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"HOORAY!" SHOUTED ERASTUS WAGG, EXCITEDLY. "THER LEETLE DAISY FROM DENVER FIGHTS THER HULL FIVE, AN' I'M A-BETTIN' ON HIS HEAD. YOOP!"

OR, THE TOLL-TAKERS OF COLORADO.

BY WILLIAM G. PATTEN,
AUTHOR OF "THE DIAMOND SPORT," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE DYING OUTLAW'S ACCUSATION.

AMONG the Colorado mining-camps of by-gone days, one of the most wide-awake and lively was Roaring Bend. It seemed almost to spring into existence in a single night, and, like many another quick-born camp, its life was lamentably short. At one time during its brief history, however, stirring events took place in and around the camp.

Among the citizens of Roaring Bend, with whom this story has to deal, was a tall, dark-faced man named Martin Reno. He was in age about thirty-five, very square-shouldered and

Daisy Dare, the Sport from Denver.

rather commanding in appearance, yet about whom there hung a mystery.

Since he first came to Roaring Bend, which was in the early days of that camp, he had never been known to do an hour's work. He stopped at the White Horse Hotel while in camp, and paid his bills regularly in advance; but there were several days at a time—occasionally a week or more—during which he would not be seen by the citizens of Roaring Bend. He had disappeared from the camp, but anon he would return as silently and mysteriously.

Some observing denizens, who had noted Reno's strange disappearances and mysterious returns, shook their sage heads and confidently declared that there was something *wrong* about the man. He took no particular interest in the mining affairs of the camp, and that fact was considered a point against him. If he was not interested in mining, why was he there? and if he was interested, why did he not show some signs of it?

But, for the greater part, the men of Roaring Bend were busy with their own business, or too excited over some new claim, to pay very particular attention to Martin Reno and his affairs. For this reason his strange actions were not noticed as much as they might have been under other circumstances.

Among other things of which Roaring Bend could boast, was a band of genuine road agents, who had their headquarters among the mountains in the immediate vicinity of the camp, and who "tolled" the most preciously-freighted stages. This band of robbers was commanded by a wild, dare-devil leader, who was known as Scarlet Mask, from the fact that the close-fitting mask which he wore was of the brightest scarlet color.

Many a time had Scarlet Mask given exhibitions of the devil-may-care daring of both himself and his followers. Once the road-agents actually "took" the camp. Two of the outlaws had been captured by the men of Roaring Bend, and were about to be treated to a taste of lynch-law, when the somber band of mountain robbers, led by their scarlet-masked chief—who was mounted upon a milk-white horse, in strange contrast to his followers, who all bestrode dark horses—dashed into the camp, yelling like fiends and recklessly discharging their revolvers.

Already had one of the captive outlaws been swung from the limb of a tree, and his companion was about to be treated likewise, when the road-riders appeared and charged the mob. Right and left the citizens of Roaring Bend scattered before the yelling robbers, not pausing to fire a single shot in return for the rattling volley which the road-agents discharged. Then, as the scarlet-faced chief swept under the gallows-tree, with a single sweep of the arm he severed the rope with a gleaming knife and caught the body of the nearly strangled outlaw as he fell.

Then the daring riders took the camp. Up and down the single street of Roaring Bend they rode, still wildly yelling and discharging their revolvers. And all the while the scarlet-faced chief sat upon the steps of the White Horse Hotel, his milk-white steed waiting near, while its master wrote rapidly upon a sheet of paper with a lead-pencil.

When the road-agents rode away they left the following brief message from their chief pinned to the door of the White Horse Hotel with a bowie-knife:

"SCARLET MASK'S DEFIANCE!"

"MEN OF ROARING BEND:—To day you have attempted to hang two of my men. I warn you that it will not be healthy for this camp to repeat the offense. This time no one has been touched by the bullets from the weapons of my followers; if you again offend me, I shall *strike to kill!*"

"I hear that certain of your citizens, on whom, perhaps, I have levied rather heavy toll, have sent for detectives to come here and hunt me down. Bah! I laugh at them, and fling my defiance in their faces! Detectives may come, but instead of taking me prisoner, they shall perish by my hand, each and every one! I am king of the road, and I defy Roaring Bend to take me prisoner!"

"Yours defiantly,

"SCARLET MASK,
"The Colorado Claude."

As may be easily imagined, when the road-riders had vanished and the men of Roaring Bend read the above warning and defiance, the excitement was intense. Fierce were the threats which the miners uttered against the outlaw-chief.

That night an indignation meeting was held in the Black Dragon Saloon, which was directly across the street from the White Horse Hotel. Bitter speeches were made against the scarlet-faced chief and his band of somber followers.

One after another, in language more forcible than elegant, the men of Roaring Bend expressed their antipathy against the outlaws.

The excitement was at a high pitch when Martin Reno arose to speak. There was something in his commanding appearance that caused the excited miners to relapse into expectant silence.

With a few well-chosen words, Reno clearly defined the position of the camp. Roaring Bend was a new strike, and had not yet fairly gotten upon its feet. New men were rapidly coming into the camp and new mines were being opened. But should this outlaw be allowed to go on as he had for a short time past, the result would be most disastrous for Roaring Bend. What capitalist would be bold enough to invest money in the mines so long as all the preciously freighted coaches were robbed by the road-agents? Plainly something decisive must be done at once. First to be done, a reward should be offered for the capture of Scarlet Mask, and with that object in view, Reno offered to contribute fifty dollars to the prize-money.

The speaker sat down amid a storm of applause. In five minutes he had gained more in popularity with the rough miners than during all the previous time which he had remained in the camp.

One after another the leading citizens of Roaring Bend followed Martin Reno's lead, and the amount offered as a reward grew rapidly. Meanwhile, Reno rapidly drew up a notice, which, as soon as he learned the amount of money raised, he read to the meeting.

It ran as follows:

"TAKE NOTICE."

"The citizens of Roaring Bend offer the amount of \$500 as a reward for the capture *dead or alive* of the road-agent and outlaw known as Scarlet Mask, and who is well known for his depredations in this vicinity. The money has been raised and placed in the hands of Joseph Clark, who is the proprietor of the White Horse Hotel."

This met the approval of the listeners, and duplicates of the notice were made, to be posted in various parts of the camp. Then the meeting adjourned.

Three evenings later Martin Reno again entered the Black Dragon Saloon. He found the place well filled. A crowd of thirsty customers were patronizing the bar, and every card-table in the room was called into use by the sports and the hard-working, card-loving miners of the camp. It is needless to state that the latter were being deliberately fleeced by the gamblers.

Barely had Reno stepped into the room when Toddy Bob, the worst old toper of the camp, lurching up to him, a light of supplication shining in his bleared eyes, as he held out his trembling hands appealingly.

"Evenin', boss!" he saluted, ducking his frowsy head. "Can't ye gi'n poor ole Bob jess ernuff to git one square snifter ter keep off ther pesky snakes? Hoper ter kick ther bucket ef I've so much ez hed er *taste* fer ther last blissid twenty-four hours. I'm jess perishin' o' thirst! Can't ye give me ernuff fer jess one drink? Say, *do!*"

But before Martin Reno could reply, the door of the saloon was burst open by the body of a man, who fell against it and then staggered into the room.

A cry of surprise burst from the inmates of the saloon as their eyes fell upon the new-comer.

The man was covered with blood and dirt from head to foot. His hat was gone, and his clothing hung about him in rags. The wild look of a hunted beast shone in his sunken eyes. He pressed his blood-stained left hand to his crimson side, and raising his right feebly above his head, uttered a wild, incoherent cry, then sunk to the floor.

Instantly the excited crowd pressed around the fallen man, but Jimmy Duff, the proprietor of the place, forced them back.

"Back, back!" he cried, sharply. "Give ther poor galoot er chance ter catch his breath. There's been foul work hyer!"

As Duff bent over the wounded man, he caught a faint whisper that came from the white lips.

Hastily the saloon-keeper procured liquor and pressed the glass to the lips of the fallen man. One or two swallows seemed to revive the unfortunate. He raised himself upon his elbow, crying:

"I have been murdered—fouly murdered! I'll tell you—"

But here he paused, glancing rapidly from face to face of the men who surrounded him.

"Spit her out, pard!" cried a miner. "We'll avenge ye!"

"I am one of Scarlet Mask's men," was the astonishing announcement that next came from

the wounded man's lips. "I was as square and loyal as any in the band, but I was falsely charged with being a traitor, and was to be shot, but I escaped. I made for this camp, but the chief followed and shot me down. I was unconscious, and I suppose he left me for dead, but I revived and managed to reach this camp."

The outlaw paused, seeming exhausted as he sunk back to the floor. He turned his eyes appealingly toward Jimmy Duff, who hastily lifted his head and again placed the glass of liquor to the wounded man's lips.

A single swallow seemed to again give the outlaw strength.

"I am dying!" he wildly cried, as he again struggled up upon his elbow. "I am dying, but I will have vengeance upon my murderer! Scarlet Mask, in disguise, is in this very room!"

This announcement created a decided sensation among the listeners. Muttered exclamations and oaths were uttered on all sides, and weapons leaped into many a hand.

"Scarlet Mask is in this very room!" repeated the outlaw, gasping painfully. "There he stands!"

For a moment the trembling finger of the speaker seemed to point straight at Martin Reno, then, with a choking cry, the outlaw fell back, dead!

CHAPTER II.

NEARLY A HANGING.

FOR a moment after the startling accusation, and the following death-cry from the lips of the outlaw, an absolute silence reigned within the Black Dragon Saloon. The robber lay where he had fallen, a death-film rapidly covering his eyes; but no one paid the slightest attention to him. Every eye was turned upon Martin Reno, who, with a look of apparent surprise upon his face, shrunk back against Toddy Bob, who stood a little back and to the left.

But soon the silence was broken by Jimmy Duff, who flashed out a revolver and leveled it straight at the head of Martin Reno, crying sharply:

"Hands up an' empty! Pull a weapon an' down ye go!"

Instantly a dozen more revolvers covered the accused, and a hoarse, angry murmur ran through the crowd. Martin Reno was in a decidedly "tight corner."

The remembrance of Reno's mysterious actions and strange disappearances from the camp flashed through the minds of those who knew him. The cause of those mysterious moves seemed to at once become obvious. Of course, while absent from the camp, Reno was with the outlaws, acting as Scarlet Mask, their chief.

No one thought of doubting the truth of the dying outlaw's accusation.

For a moment Martin Reno seemed paralyzed by surprise as he heard the terribly condemnatory words that fell from the lips of the robber. Then, as he saw the weapons in the hands of the miners and sports turned upon him, he seemed to suddenly throw off the lethargy of amazement which had come over him. Unheeding the combined command and warning which Jimmy Duff had uttered—regardless of the leveled weapons which were turned upon him, Reno leaped backward toward the wall, knocking down Toddy Bob as he did so.

A single bound, and the accused placed his back against the wall, a revolver gleaming in the lamp-light, as he flung up his right hand, crying sternly:

"Easy, men! Don't press me too hard, or more than one will suffer!"

His face had become singularly white—almost ghastly in its hard-set, marble-like appearance—yet his voice did not falter, nor did the hand tremble which grasped the leveled revolver. He evidently intended to defend himself to the best of his ability.

As for those who confronted the man thus driven at bay, they intended to shoot only when it became necessary to do so to keep their prey from escaping. If this man was indeed Scarlet Mask, the outlaw, then death by hanging should be his fate. Death by bullet or steel—that would be an unsatisfactory way of wiping out the score against him.

Again there were a few moments of utter silence, as the accused man resolutely faced his many foes. Then Jimmy spoke up.

"It's no use, Reno," he declared. "You may as well give yourself up; you cannot escape. We can fill ye full of lead in a second. It's all blamed foolishness fer you to attempt to buck ag'in' this crowd."

"Give up!" came scornfully from Martin Reno's lips—"allow this crowd to take me a

helpless prisoner! Wait a little, Duff, and let us understand this affair. Of what am I accused?"

"You heard the dying galoot's words," replied the saloon-keeper. "He declared that you are Scarlet Mask—"

"And lied with his last breath!" flashed the man at bay. "To claim that I am the outlaw-chief—the idea is simply ridiculous!"

"Dunno about that," retorted Duff, doggedly. "I'll allow that yer actions have been mighty kinder queer since you've hung out 'round this camp. More'n one of them boys has sp'ected that ye wasn't just square. You're cornered an' may as well give up. We'll give ye a fair trial."

A fair trial! The idea that the men of Roaring Bend would pause to give the man accused of being Scarlet Mask a fair trial! To Reno it seemed simply ridiculous.

"I shall not surrender myself into the hands of this mob," declared Reno, resolutely. "Such an act would be suicidal. I shall defend myself to the last extremity."

At this moment Toddy Bob, who had been lying upon the floor where he had fallen, sat up feebly rubbing his head, and gazing around in a dazed manner. His downfall had been so sudden and unexpected that, for a short time, he had lain upon his back, apparently wondering what had occurred.

"Sumbuddy fell down," muttered Bob, as he sat up and rubbed the back of his head where it had come in contact with the floor. "Guess 'twas ole Bob by the way his head aches. Ding sich er hard floor, anyway!"

With an effort, he struggled partially to his feet, but did not seem to fully gain his equilibrium, for with a sudden lurch, he staggered up against Martin Reno. With a fierce exclamation, Reno hurled the drunkard from him, and again Toddy Bob struck the floor with a "dull thud."

But a moment had the accused man been thrown off his guard, but that instant was enough for the men who confronted him. With wild cries, half-a-dozen leaped toward Reno, intent on taking him prisoner.

One shot, only, was fired. Flinging up his hand, the desperate man at bay discharged his revolver with the muzzle almost touching the breast of one of the attacking party. Indeed, so near was the man that, though the bullet went straight through his heart, his onward motion was not checked until he came against his slayer—then he fell dead at Martin Reno's feet.

Then the desperate man was seized by many hands, and a fierce struggle ensued. Fierce it was, but brief, for Reno, partially stunned by heavy blows upon the head, was borne to the floor and held down by strong hands.

His wrists were quickly bound behind him, and he was lifted upon his feet, although strong hands still grasped his arms.

As the crowd surged back, a big, broad-shouldered fellow knelt beside the man whom Reno had shot. A hasty examination showed that the fellow was stone-dead.

A fierce cry broke from the lips of the big man, as he leaped to his feet, his eyes burning with an angry light.

"He's dead—my pard, Charley!" he cried. "Dead! an' he was er white man! This devil has murdered Charley Dorr, my lads—laid 'im out afore our eyes—"

"Lynch him!" was the hoarse cry which interrupted the speaker.

A fierce murmur ran through the crowd, gradually growing louder and fiercer, steadily increasing in volume, each moment growing more alarming, until it finally became a hoarse, appalling yell that was fairly deafening in the now crowded room.

Only too well did the white-faced prisoner know the terrible meaning of that fierce cry, and a shiver ran over his strong form, as an awful choking feeling of dread assailed him. He felt that he was doomed.

As that appalling sound died away, Jimmy Duff forced his way to Reno's side and faced the crowd, flinging up one hand to command silence. As soon as he could make himself heard, the saloon-keeper cried:

"We want to go a little slow, pards. This man may not be Scarlet Mask. If he ain't, we can't hardly blame him for for not wantin' to fall inter the hands of this hyer crowd. Slow an' sure'll pay best in this affair. Let's give the man a fair and square deal."

But he might as well attempt to check as many maddened beasts. With a snarling curse Big Hank, Charley Dorr's partner, sprung forward, and seizing Duff by the shoulders, unheeding the sharp blows which the little saloon-

keeper rained into his face, lifted him from the floor and hurled him away.

Reno was dragged from the Black Dragon Saloon, out into the pale moonlight.

Near at hand, almost in the center of the camp, stood a tree which more than once had served as a gallows, and toward this tree the crowd rushed, bearing the prisoner along.

Some one had procured a rope, and Reno felt a noose fitted around his neck as he was hurried toward the fatal tree. Evidently the blood-thirsty mob intended to execute their ghastly work as expeditiously as possible.

Beneath the tree the crowd halted. The rope was thrown over a stout limb, and willing hands grasped it. The crowd surged back a little, leaving an open space around the pale-faced prisoner.

The rays of the moon, falling aslant upon the earth, lit up the strange scene with a pale, ghostly light. Although the prisoner was standing beneath the tree, it was not upon the shadowy side—there the moonlight falling upon his bloodless, fear-marked face made it seem almost ghastly.

Big Hank stepped forward and confronted the prisoner.

"Ef ye've got anything ter say," slowly spoke the big man, "spit her right out to onc't, fer I don't reckon ye'll feel much like talkin' afore shortly. Yer minnits on this terrestrial sphere are mighty few. Thet dyin' galoot back in the saloon 'cused ye o' bein' Scarlet Mask. Ef ye be that critter, ye might as well youp it out, straight an' square."

"It's a lie!" cried the prisoner, chokingly, exhibiting fear unexpected in one who had so resolutely faced the mob in the saloon, "a lie! a foul lie, gentlemen! I am not Scarlet Mask—I swear to you that I am not! If you hang me, you will hang an innocent man! You are too fast, gentlemen. Give me a little time! I am not Scarlet Mask!" he repeated, wildly. I swear that I am not!"

"Waal, swear away, an' be durned to ye!" rudely interposed Big Hank. "Swearin' won't save yer life, by er durned heap. You killed Charley Dorr, my pard, an' one o' ther best men o' ther camp. I reckon that's ernuff ter stretch yer neck."

He turned to the men who grasped the rope, motioning for them to prepare to launch the prisoner into eternity; but, at this moment, there came a startling interruption.

A wild, maniacal laugh electrified the crowd, then a dark form dropped down from among the foliage of the tree, alighting upon the ground in front of the prisoner, and uttering another meaningless laugh, as it crouched in its tracks.

That the new-comer was a man was apparent at a glance, but he was a wild-looking creature, indeed. As he crouched there in the moonlight, his pale, haggard-looking face, lit by two sunken, yet fiercely-burning eyes, was turned for a moment toward the crowd. His hair and beard were matted and tangled, and his white teeth seemed to glisten as his lips were drawn back by that horrible laugh. He was hatless, and his clothing hung about him in rags.

He ceased his laughing, and raising his hands above his head, shook them wildly, crying out incoherently.

"It's the madman!" gasped more than one in the crowd.

The strange being was not unknown in Roaring Bend. Many of the citizens had seen him before, and nearly all who had not seen him, had heard of him from the lips of those who had. But little was known of the madman, however, except that he lived somewhere in the mountains near Roaring Bend.

Whirling from the crowd, with a cat-like movement, the crazy creature crouched before the prisoner, as though about to spring upon the helpless man. Stretching forth one hand, he pointed a long, bony finger accusingly at Martin Reno, who shrunk back as far as the tight-drawn rope around his neck would permit, his face plainly marked with a look of horror.

From the lips of the madman came these hissing words:

"You—you are the vile creature who attempted to murder me and rob me of my share of the gold! Ah! the gold—the precious gold! You tried to kill me, but I still live! and you shall die—die like a dog!"

He ended with another maniacal laugh, which was interrupted by Reno, who shrieked in terror:

"Take him away! take him away! For God's sake don't let him touch me! Help! help!"

Then came the sound of a sharp whistle, cutting through the evening air, followed by the

rapid clatter of horses' hoofs, as a band of masked horsemen came dashing down the street. Mounted upon a milk-white steed, and riding at the head of the somber horsemen, was a scarlet-masked form which the crowd instantly recognized.

"Scarlet Mask!" was the startled cry that broke from half-a-hundred lips.

Almost before a move could be made by the astonished men of Roaring Bend, the outlaws were upon them, yelling hoarsely and discharging their revolvers. Seized by a sudden panic at thus being charged a second time by the outlaws as they were about to perform a lynching, the citizens of the camp fled for shelter.

But the outlaws never paused. Straight by the gallows-tree they dashed and on down the street, untouched by the few hasty shots sent after them.

When the miners came back to the gallows-tree, however, they found that both the madman and their prisoner, Martin Reno, were gone.

CHAPTER III.

AN OMINOUS WARNING.

THE mountain stage, southward bound toward Roaring Bend, was rattling along the rough and rocky trail at a rapid pace.

The stage was well loaded with passengers, but only four among the entire number command our attention. Two of these were inside; the others were the stage-driver and an individual who sat upon the box by the driver's side.

The two inside passengers were a lady and a gentleman. The former was young and very pretty. Her hair was dark, as were also her large, luminous eyes. Her full, red lips when parted by a laugh, revealed two rows of even, pearly teeth. Her complexion was simply perfect. She was attired in a neat and stylish brown traveling dress, which plainly showed the graceful contour of her small figure.

The gentleman was apparently about forty years of age. He wore a full brown beard, which concealed his features in a great measure. His eyes, which could be seen beneath the drooping brim of the dark hat, were of a gray-blue color, changing and restless, as though their owner was ever nervously on the alert. He was dressed in a plain, black suit.

He gave his name as Warren Kent, and casually mentioned to the young lady that he intended to stop at Roaring Bend for a few days, at least.

While waiting for the stage at Bolter's Bar, an accident had caused the lady and gentleman to exchange a few words, and as they sat side by side in the stage, after a little, they gradually entered into conversation.

"So you are going to stop in Roaring Bend," said Warren Kent, continuing the conversation but recently begun. "Have you friends there?"

"I am not sure," was the reply, in a low, musical voice. "I may find a dear friend there—I may not. It is hardly probable, however, that I shall be fortunate enough to find him."

Although the man sent a quick sidelong inquiring look toward the young lady, he said nothing, evidently not wishing to become too inquisitive.

After a few moments' silence, the lady continued:

"I am searching for my father, who came to Colorado nearly four years ago. He left mother and me in our Eastern home, while he came to this country to seek his fortune. For two years we heard from him regularly, then his letters suddenly ceased, and we did not hear from him afterward."

"Ah, that is the story of many who come to this wild Western land to seek their fortunes," returned Kent, slowly and gravely. "They suddenly cease to correspond with their families or friends in the East, and in far too many cases, I fear, they are never after heard from."

The girl bowed her head, and once more remained silent for a short space of time. When she again looked up it was to say slowly, almost hopelessly:

"Your words do not increase but renew my fears that something dreadful has happened to father. The many letters sent to him remain unanswered. A few months ago my dear mother died, and as soon as possible, without consulting my friends, without even their knowledge, I gathered enough money to do so, and started West in search of my father."

"I wish you the best of success, and, if it is possible, will assist you in any manner," uttered the brown-bearded man. "Was your father somewhere in this vicinity when you last heard from him?"

Daisy Dare, the Sport from Denver.

"I think so. When he wrote his last letter he was about starting out in search for what he called a gold *cache*." In his younger days father practiced medicine, and when he came West, his knowledge in this line was occasionally put to use. It seems that he saved the life of an Indian, who had been badly injured in a bar-room encounter. Out of gratitude, the red-man gave my father a drawing, or map, by the aid of which he claimed that a hidden cave, in which was concealed a vast amount of gold, might be found."

"Ah!" exclaimed Kent, his eye glowing with a nervous, excited light. "Go on! I am growing interested."

The young lady continued:

"The Indian told my father that, many years before, a party of miners ventured far into the mountains, which was infested by the hostile red-men, in search for gold. They were successful beyond their most sanguine expectations. In a short time they took out a large amount of the precious metal and then they started back, for some of the mining-camps. But they were attacked by Indians, and took refuge in a cave. There they concealed their precious treasure, and one of them made a drawing of the surrounding country, as nearly correct as he could. Then, one night, the whites made a dash for freedom; but they were surrounded and massacred by the red-men, not one escaping. The drawing showing the location of the cave fell into the hands of the Indian who gave it to my father."

For a few moments Warren Kent did not speak. He seemed endeavoring to gain control of his nerves, which for some reason were somewhat shaken. When he finally ventured to give utterance to words, his voice seemed hoarse and strained.

"May I venture to ask your father's name?"

"His name is Greydon—Lewis Greydon," was her reply.

A half-smothered exclamation burst from Warren Kent's lips.

"You knew him—my father!" cried the lady, excitedly.

"Perhaps I may have met him," was the unsteady reply. "In this wild country one meets many people whom he soon forgets; but I have heard the name—I am sure I have."

But although he apparently endeavored to speak in a convincing tone, his voice sounded strangely as though he was endeavoring to conceal something. The conviction that this man had known her father leaped into the girl's mind and grew rapidly.

"Oh, if you could only give me some clew!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands with emotion—"if you knew something that would assist me in finding out about him after he came to this wild land—if you *only* knew!"

The man bowed his head, and for a time seemed to be thinking deeply. Finally he turned toward the girl, saying:

"Miss Greydon, allow me to assure you, as I before stated, that, if I can assist you in any way, I will do so. I know something of this part of Colorado, and I have been in Roaring Bend, whither we are going; therefore I am somewhat familiar with that camp. It is a decidedly rough place, being comparatively young. You may need a friend while in the camp. If you do, do not fail to regard me as such, and unhesitatingly call on me for any favor in my power to bestow."

"The name of Lewis Greydon sounds familiar. I have heard it somewhere and at some past time. If I can have time to think, I may remember where and when."

Then he again relapsed into silence, and seemed to be trying to recall some incident of the past which had escaped his memory.

But despite the apparent warmth of Warren Kent's words, Edna Greydon felt a sudden repulsion for the man, and involuntarily shrunk from him.

Meanwhile the stage was rattling and rocking, as it rolled down a winding canyon, while upon the seat beside the driver was a dandified appearing individual, who was engaged in conversation with the veteran Jehu.

It took but a glance at the person beside the driver, however, to learn that he was not one of the shallow-headed, drawling fops too often seen in the East; instead, he belonged to that class of elegant, genteel sports, samples of which are occasionally met among the Western mines.

He was dressed from head to foot in a handsome, costly suit of brown corduroy, which fitted his full, rounded limbs to perfection. He was slightly below medium height, yet his build showed to an experienced eye that he was pos-

sessed of great suppleness and strength. His slightest movement revealed alertness.

The patent-leathers upon his feet shone brilliantly. Upon his head he wore a wide-brimmed light hat, which was encircled by a fine golden chain. He wore a fine linen shirt, the bosom of which was polished and immaculate. Around his neck was a neatly-fitting collar, and a brown silk necktie was knotted in front. Upon the bosom of his shirt was a pin, representing a small gold daisy, with a first-water diamond flashing in the center of the flower. A second and larger pin, similar in all respects, except being minus the diamond, was fastened to the left side of his hat.

From beneath the light-colored hat fell a wealth of long curling yellow hair. A handsome mustache adorned the sport's upper lip. His features were finely formed, and his eyes dark-blue, seemingly filled with a jovial light of unfailing good-humor.

The driver was a tall, bearded Westerner, whose name was Jonathan Smiles, but who was commonly known as "Long John." He had been giving his companion a veracious account of the "all-durned keeless kind o' style" in which Scarlet Mask had been "kayvortin'" around Roaring Bend.

"Ther durned ornerary galoot hes drapped down onter me erbout a dozen times since I've been running this hyer hearse. Allus run plumb ag'in' him somers erlong ther trail as I was goin' in or strikin' out o' ther Bend. He allus hed his boyees wi' him, an' when I clapped peepers onto them air galoots with their cocked and leveled guns, an' heerd Scarlet Mask sing out, 'Halt—han's up,' you bet I pulled up ther hearse an' elevated my dukes."

The little sport smiled.

"It seems, then, that you didn't stand for ceremony," he observed.

"Nary stand!" was the grim reply, as the driver cracked his long whip and yelled to the horses. "I allus managed ter cum to a dead halt jest erbout as soon as possible. Ter witness ther genteel way in which Scarlet Mask usually ranges ther pilgrims in a line an' goes through them is ernuff ter make an angel weep."

"I suppose the chances are that we shall be held up by this scarlet-masked highwayman ere we reach Roaring Bend?" the sport carelessly suggested.

"Well, we may; then ag'in we may not. I reckon ef there's any galoot abo'r'd the hearse as is overloaded wi' wealth, Scarlet Mask knows it an' will call on us."

"Then he has spies who keep him posted?" interrogatively.

"That's w'at they say. I don't know whether it are true or not; but I do know that ther outlaw allus drops onter ther hearse at jest ther right times, to make ther best hauls. He never strikes a skinned crowd, you bet yer boots!"

For a few minutes the sport whistled softly, seemingly meditating, as the stage rolled on down the canyon. Finally he turned to the driver, inquiring:

"Did you ever attempt to run through the road-agents' lines?"

"What in thunder d'ye take me fer?" was the explosive exclamation that burst from the driver's lips, as that individual cast a look of indignation toward his companion.

A light laugh of amusement broke from the daisy sport's lips.

"I take you for a sensible man and a mighty handy man with the ribbons," was the compliment which partially mollified the half-angry driver. "Nevertheless," continued the speaker, "I thought it possible that you might have attempted to run through the outlaws. The trick has been done more than once. Should the road-agents attempt to stop the stage to-day, we might succeed in cutting through their—"

A short, mocking laugh interrupted him. The sound came from overhead, and involuntarily both the sport and the driver glanced quickly upward, to see standing upon the very edge of a projecting ledge, some distance up the almost perpendicular side of the canyon, a dark-clothed, scarlet-masked figure—the daring Claude of Colorado!

As they glanced upward, the outlaw tossed a small white object toward the stage, at the same time making a graceful motion with his right hand, as he leaped backward and disappeared, even while the echoes of his mocking laugh were lingering in the canyon. He vanished none too soon for his own safety, however, for, with an almost lightning-like motion, the daisy sport flashed out a revolver and fired. But, even as he pulled the trigger, he realized that the shot was wasted.

The sport did not try to avoid the small, white

object which Scarlet Mask had tossed toward him, but deftly caught it with his left hand, even while his right handled his revolver.

A laugh that seemed almost the echo of the outlaw's broke from the lips of the yellow-haired sport, as he lowered his revolver. Instead of appearing startled or alarmed, he actually seemed amused.

The passengers within the stage were startled by hearing the shot, but upon looking out and seeing nothing to alarm them, they presumed that no occurrence of import had taken place.

"A peculiar trick," coolly commented the daisy sport, as he examined the small object which Scarlet Mask had tossed them. "What have we here? A message, I take it."

The object proved to be a small, round stone with a paper wrapped securely around it. Upon removing the paper, it became evident that there was writing upon it.

This was the brief, yet ominous warning, minus heading or signature, which the sport found written upon the paper:

"The hunted stag may turn at bay and slay the hound! Beware!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE SPORT ON HIS MUSCLE.

"My name is Daisy Dare, gentlemen. I am fresh from Denver. Heard there was fun in these parts, and so I just dropped down. I'm onto anything—eucher, poker, faro, *anything* in the list. Look me over carefully, and size me up. I'm small, but you sometimes find the best articles in small packages."

Half-laughingly, mingled with a touch of defiance, these words came from the daisy's lips, as he slowly whirled round upon one foot, so that the men of Roaring Bend might more fully inspect his elegant figure, and it is safe to say that every eye in the saloon of the Black Dragon was turned upon him.

Never before had such a dashing individual appeared in the camp, and the inmates of the place gazed at him in silence for several moments. In the eyes of many there was an undisguised look of admiration, but a few of the rougher class showed unconcealed signs of disgust. They evidently took the sport for a common fop, their powers of perception being dulled by the vile liquor they had drank.

Daisy Dare slowly whirled till he faced the men at the card-tables, then paused, removed the small cigar from between his white teeth, and after leisurely blowing a wreath of fragrant smoke toward the ceiling, he interrogated:

"Well, gentlemen, how do I strike you?"

Big Hank arose from a table where he had been seated with several companions. He had been drinking deeply; in fact, the big man had kept himself under the influence of liquor since the night when his unfortunate pard, Charley Dorr, had fallen before the revolver held in the hand of Martin Reno.

"Waal," he growled, "ye strike me like er durned fresh from Rainwater Bar. Ef ye've cum ter this hyer camp ter sling on style an' make an all-thunderin' spread, I reckon ye'll find this hyer lokality too warm fer yer health."

"Ah! Now is that so?" came slowly from the sport's lips, as he suddenly became very grave, almost appearing alarmed.

"I reckon it are," was the hoarse reply, as the big man's bloodshot eyes glowed savagely. "It's my advice, sonny, fer you ter get out o' hyer an' strike fer er safer kentry. Milk-an'-water lads like *you* hed better stay ter hum wi' their mammys."

"Oh, stay at home, Tommy!—dear Tommy, don't go!" softly sung the daisy sport, just the ghost of a smile appearing for a moment upon his handsome face.

Big Hank scowled blackly as he advanced a step or two toward the mocking speaker, who suddenly ceased to smile, and, with a look of alarm, stepped hastily backward as the big man advanced.

"You'll sing er different cuine, afore shortly, my kid," growled the rough, clinching his huge fists, menacingly. "W'ot d'yer mean by cumin' in hyer an' makin' such er durned spread? I've haft er min' ter paint yer two purty eyes in mournin'."

"Oh, don't, sir!—pray don't!" gasped the little sport, showing the strongest symptoms of fear, as he glanced nervously around, as though for the best avenue of escape. "Indeed, you could not be so cruel!"

"Oh-ho! c'u'dn't I?" with a hoarse chuckle, as Big Hank plainly showed that he enjoyed the dandy's apparent fright. "Why, mer gentle kid, I've often chawed u' half er dozen such tenderfuts as you afore breakfast in ther mornin'."

Daisy Dare, the Sport from Denver.

"Oh horrors! Are you a horrible cannibal?" falteringly asked Daisy Dare. "What a dreadful creature you must be!"

Although Hank was pleased by the daisy sport's apparent fear, he was also disappointed by seeing Dare, to all appearances, take water so quickly. The big man was just spoiling for a fight, and nothing would have pleased him more than to have seen the little dandy audaciously make some bold reply, thus giving the bully an excuse for "spreading" the sport all over the room.

"I'm a bad man, sonny," declared Hank, with an air of mingled braggadocio and disappointment; "but seein's yer er tender kid, I'll be easy wi' you. Ef ye'll stan' drinks fer ther crowd, we'll call it square."

"Yesh, shet 'em up—hic!—all round. We'll all drink stin' blind—hic!—Johnny fill up the bowl!"

Half-talking, half-singing, punctuating his sentences with frequent hiccoughs, Toddy Bob reeled through the wide arch from the bar-room into the gambling apartment. At a glance it was evident that the old toper was thoroughly drunk.

Bob had caught the last words spoken by Big Hank, and at once volunteered the advice given above. Already the old bum's breath smelt strongly of bad whisky, but it was a frigid day when he got so full that he coul'n't "surround" another "snifter."

It did not take much to arouse Big Hank's temper, and with a few hasty strides, he advanced and caught Toddy Bob by the collar, and then shook him as a terrier might a rat.

"Wot in blue blazes do you mean by puttin' in yer lip w'en 'tain't called fer?" he growled. "You close yer hash-trap fer er while, an' lay thar."

With the final words, he flung the ragged toper from him. Bob struck the floor with a heavy thump, and slid out of sight under a table, where he lay quite still, groaning dismally.

Then the big ruffian turned to the sport, who had flung aside his cigar, and was now advancing toward Big Hank.

"Waal, chicken, air you goin' ter set 'em up?" asked the bully.

"No!" was the ringing reply, "I don't propose to set anything *up*, but if you don't pull that poor fellow from beneath that table, stand him on his feet, and apologize for the brutal way in which you have used him, I'll knock something *down*!"

For a few moments after this bold speech utter silence reigned within the room. The men at the card-tables were breathlessly watching the little sport and the huge ruffian, and as for the latter, he was paralyzed with astonishment at the audacious words which came from the small man's lips. Toddy Bob, still lying beneath the table, ceased his groaning and began singing:

"Ther old man's drunk as drunk can be,
Ther victim—hic!—of dead-rot whiskey!"

With an ugly laugh Big Hank leaped toward Daisy Dare, evidently intending to catch the little sport in his strong grasp. But Dare was like the proverbial flea; when you put your hand on him he wasn't there. He seemed to actually slip under the bully's arm and come up smilingly behind the rough.

Perhaps it would have been impossible at that moment to have found a more astonished person than Big Hank. For an instant he coul'n't hardly realize what had become of the little dandy; but he quickly whirled and found the sport, with folded arms, quietly gazing at him. Even then Hank could not understand how the trick had been accomplished.

"Dodged, did ye, you blamed little rat?" he hoarsely interrogated. "Kind o' slipp'ry, air ye? Waal, I reckon ye won't be able to play that trick onter yer uncle ernuther time."

"Will you apologize to the musical gentleman under the table?" quietly asked Daisy Dare, as Toddy Bob still continued singing.

"Apolergize be durned!" snorted the rough. "I tell ye w'ot I will do: I'll shake ther day-lights outen *you*, ef I get my hands onter ye."

"Go fer 'im, Hank!" cried Holy Joe, one of the bully's companions, who had been sitting at the table from which Big Hank had arisen. "Knock ther dandy mug offen 'im."

"Hyer's sport," shouted another. "Form a ring!"

"Form a ring! form a ring?" cried several voices, and at once the crowd gathered around the two men.

"Strip off yer togs, Hank!"

"Strip nuthin'," replied the bully, who was in his shirt-sleeves. "I reckon et won't heat

me er great deal ter larn this stunted young purp. Get ready, mer kid."

"I am ready," replied Daisy Dare, as he completed buttoning his coat tightly around him. "Now, my sweet-smelling posy, sail in and get your cognomen elevated."

At once Big Hank rushed to the attack. Blow after blow he struck at the daisy sport, who stood firm in his tracks and quietly parried them all, seemingly without any great exertion. The cool, confident smile never left Daisy Dare's lips as he faced his overgrown opponent.

Amazed at his non-success in hitting the small man, Big Hank rained in his blows faster and faster, hoping to beat down Daisy Dare's guard. In his mad anger, the bully left his own face and breast exposed, and at once the sport took advantage of the opportunity thus given, now and then hitting the big man a sharp, stinging blow in the face.

Gradually Daisy Dare ceased to stand on the defensive and began to grow aggressive. Slowly and surely he pressed forward, driving the big man back. Hank now fought wildly; blindly striking heavy but ineffectual blows, and at the same time receiving no light blows from the hard knuckles of his small opponent.

Suddenly Big Hank received a blow fairly between the eyes, and would surely have measured his length upon the floor had not one of his friends caught and supported him.

Brushing a hand across his eyes in a dazed manner, Hank again advanced toward the little sport, whose pugilistic ability he had so erroneously judged. In order to puzzle the giant, Daisy Dare did not remain in one place and meet his antagonist, but skipped lightly here and there around the ring.

"Oh, keep still just er second till I get at ye," growled Big Hank, vainly endeavoring to follow the swift motions of his nimble foe.

One of Big Hank's friends, seeing that the bully was getting much the worst of the encounter, attempted to trip the little sport. But Daisy Dare was too nimble to be caught in such a manner.

Instantly a voice among the crowd cried: "Let up there, you duffer! None of that! Give the fellow fair play. The first son-of-a-gun as tries to come a foul on the little man will have to settle with me, an' my name is Wagg!"

Suddenly the sport planted a blow under Big Hank's left ear that once more fairly staggered the rough; then Dare quickly followed up his advantage and struck a second blow that the bully received in the pit of the stomach, just above the belt. With the wind fairly knocked out of him, Big Hank doubled up like a jack-knife, as Daisy Dare seized him by the shirt-collar and a convenient part of his pants, and, with strength that seemed fairly marvelous for so small a man, lifted the heavy body of the bully into the air and held him in a horizontal position above his head.

For a moment the little sport held Big Hank thus before the astonished eyes of the spectators, then, with a light laugh, he hurled the bully headlong against the man who ha'l tried to trip him up, and both went to the floor.

Then a hoarse voice cried:

"Carter ther leetle man! *He is one of Scarlet Mask's outlaws!* Take him, dead or alive!"

CHAPTER V.

FIVE AGAINST ONE.

FOR a moment after these startling words rung through the room every one remained silent. Then the daisy sport uttered a sharp yell and with a ringing laugh, made a quick, short run, and leaped upward into the air.

Fairly over the heads of the crowd sailed the little man at the side where the ring was but two or three deep, performing the feat as handsomely as a circus acrobat could have done.

Barely had the feet of the nimble sport touched the floor, when, with another ringing yell, and another panther-like leap, he sprung upon the top of a table standing near, and the next instant whirled and, with his arms carelessly folded, faced the crowd.

The bland, good-natured smile never for a moment left the face of the Daisy from Denver. As he stood upon the table, he seemed entirely at his ease, yet his eyes were hastily scanning the upturned faces before him, searching for the person who had uttered the accusing words given at the close of the last chapter.

Almost instantly the sport discerned a face that seemed familiar. It needed but a second glance to show him that he was looking fairly into the eyes of Long John, the stage-driver, and something seemed to tell him that he was gazing at the man who had accused him. The next

moment this belief was verified, for the driver cried:

"Catch ther galoot! Don't let him escape! I'll sw'ar ther he is one o' ther agints!"

"And then, my friend, allow me, under the circumstances, to inform the present congregation that you are a magnificent double-barreled liar!"

The daisy sport's voice was very smooth and even, and still upon his handsome face rested a bland, good-natured smile. He was made of no common material, this little man; he was one who could control his nerves as dangers multiplied and smile sweetly in the face of a hundred foes. There was something in his frank, open manner which unconsciously attracted and drew an honest man to him.

"I believe it!" squealed a voice among the crowd, as a rather ragged man tried to press his way forward. "I believe it, an' my name's Wagg!"

"Down with ther little rat!" cried the hoarse voice of one of Big Hank's chums. "Kill 'im!"

An ominous murmur came from the rougher part of the gathering, and many hands reached for weapons; but before a revolver could be drawn and leveled, Daisy Dare's voice was again heard.

"Go a little slow, gentlemen!" he warned. "You will observe that I am armed."

Although the entire crowd was watching him, not one could tell how it was done, but like a flash of light, a pair of elegant revolvers appeared in the hands of the daisy, and they were leveled at the throng of men below.

"The first individual who is rash enough to lift a shooter," added the sport, "will receive from my hands a gentle reminder of his folly."

"Whoopie! That's ther way ter talk it!" and the ragged man forced his way through the crowd, and, reaching a table near the one upon which the sport stood, he climbed upon it.

"My gentle galoots," he continued, as he arose to his feet, "allow me ter intrejue myself: I am Erastus Wagg, ther woolly-headed man," and he removed his dilapidated hat and bowed profoundly to the crowd.

"Ye will observe, me wall-eyed posies, that ther entire ruff o' my Websterian cranium is coated with er double-an'-twisted fleece o' ther finest merino wool; hence ther name 'woolly-headed man'."

And it was true that the head exposed to view was covered with fine curly, white hair, which looked more like the wool of a sheep than anything else. As for the face of the "woolly-headed man," it was beardless; and a comical, jovial-appearing, and withal, a thoroughly homely face it was.

"Pilgrims," Erastus Wagg once more spoke up, after a slight pause, at the same time replacing his hat upon his head, "I witnessed ther sarkus that hes just took place in this estab'lishment, an' I am led to reemark that ther way in which ther leetle man closed up ther big galoot's establishment was simply beaucherful—splendiferous! It caused my tender heart ter swell with admiration till it felt as big as er Congressman's head arter er social evenin' out. I c'u'd hardly restrain my pent-up emotions. It war wi' deefikility that I refrained frum speakin' rite out loud in meetin', an' lettin' off er cupple o' yoops that would hav knocked ther hair offen er bald-headed parson.

"Furder, I heerd ther truth-twistin' son o' er heathen Chinee as 'cused ther leetle man o' bein' an outlaw. I never hed ther excruciating pleasure o' meetin' ther leetle gent afore this one blessid night, but I kinder like ther look o' his phisog, an' I'm a-bettin' er hundred ter nothin' that he ain't no measly outlaw. Anyhow, I'm a-stan'in' by ther man wi' ther gold daisies, an' don't yer fergit ter remember *that*. You hear me twitter, an' ye will obsarve that I am armed. My name is Wagg!"

With the concluding words, the woolly-headed man produced from some part of his clothing a long-barreled, rusty-looking revolver, and, grinning from ear to ear, proceeded to cock and level it at the crowd.

The appearance of Erastus Wagg was so comical that involuntarily a portion of the spectators broke into a laugh, whereupon the eccentric old fellow again removed his hat with his left hand, and vigorously ducked his woolly head several times, grinning all the while.

"Now," and the revolver in the hand of Erastus Wagg was leveled straight at Long John, the stage-driver, "now, you long-shanks, with a Grecian bend fer a nose, you've called the leetle man an outlaw—prove it!"

"Easy 'nuff!" hoarsely growled Long John, and with a few words he related how the outlaw chief, Scarlet Mask, had communicated

with the daisy sport that afternoon, while the stage was coming through Skelton Canyon.

"Now, concluded the stage-driver, "ef he ain't one o' Scarlet Mask's outlaws, w'ot's they sendin' leetle messages to each other fer?"

An amused laugh broke from Daisy Dare's lips.

"Gentlemen," said the sport, calmly, "you have heard the driver's story, and I will acknowledge that what he has related is true, but he did not tell the whole. He should have stated that I fired at the scarlet-faced outlaw, who, I am confident to say, barely escaped my lead as he sprung back to cover."

"A slim trick," cried Long John. "I don't believe ye p'inted yer gun at them outlaw at all. It was all er make-game ter pull ther wool over ther eyes o' we galoots. But it won't work."

Thrusting his left-hand revolver into one of the side-pockets of his coat, but still keeping his other weapon ready for "business," Daisy Dare produced from a pocket the very paper upon which were written the warning words from Scarlet Mask.

"My friends," said the sport, "I have here the communication that I this afternoon received from the scarlet-masked outlaw. This is the 'leetle message' to which my accuser refers. Will some one please read it aloud?"

Instantly a tall, light-haired gambler stepped forward, and without hesitation took the crumpled piece of paper, and in a clear tone of voice, read the brief, yet ominous warning aloud.

With a word of thanks, Daisy Dare took the paper as the gambler passed it back to him.

"You have heard the epistle," and the man from Denver once more turned to the crowd; "Does it sound much like a friendly communication? What is your verdict—guilty or not?"

"Not guilty!" snorted the woolly-headed man.

Various cries came from the crowd. Some of the roughs, Big Hank's friends in particular, cried out "guilty," but the greater part of the men in the room were favorably impressed by the frank, open manner of the little sport, and the shout of "not guilty" drowned the other cries.

Restoring his revolver to its hiding-place, the yellow-haired sport bowed gracefully in acknowledgment. As soon as the noise ceased, he said:

"I thank you, men of Roaring Bend, for the confidence you place in my squareness, and I assure you that confidence is not ill-bestowed. I think you will find Daisy Dare a white man, and one to tie to."

"Them's *my* sentiments!" squealed Erastus Wagg. "I'm a-bettin' my wealth onto the leetle man, an' *my* name's Wagg!"

"But that man," continued Dare, pointing straight at Long John, "knew that he was lying when he accused me of being an outlaw. He knew what words were on the paper that I received from the scarlet-faced chief, for I read them to him to-day."

"I can't read; I thort ye war lyin'," declared Long John.

"Pah!" cried the sport, with a laugh. "Don't try to crawl out now! You have got to settle with me."

"Thet's right enough," growled the driver. "I'm ready ter give ye satisfaction any time when ye want it."

"I never put off till to-morrow what I can just as well do to-day," laughed the Daisy; "therefore, my dear Jonathan, you may consider yourself engaged for a little fore-and-after, which will occur this present eve, out beneath the mellow light of the moon—that is, if you do not object."

"I'm reddy ter meet ye, an' bein' s it's my ch'ice o' weppins, I'm a-takin' pistils."

"Good enough! You couldn't have pleased me more if you had tried a month of Sundays. We will have a little circus which will be amusing for the spectators."

"Hole on hyer!" came the rough voice of Holy Joe. "I reckon I hev er small-sized bone ter pick with this dandy gerloot. He half-killed Hank, an' he's got ter settle wi' me afore he fights any one else. You hear me shout?"

"Another town heard from," cried Daisy Dare, lightly. "Two to fight. All right; I'll meet you both at once, the weapons being pistols."

Then Big Hank, looking decidedly the worse for the rough usage he had received, pressed his way forward.

"This is *my* fight," he declared, "an' I'm the howlin' hyena w'ot's a-goin' ter settle this business with ther dandy. He's my meat! I fight him first!"

"Whoopie!" again squealed the woolly-head-

ed man. "I admire yer pluck, stranger, but dad burn yer brains!"

"Three!" quietly counted the sport. "I'll fight you all at once, and as many more of your friends at the same time as want to come into the game."

"Then count me in," cried Angel Dave, another of Big Hank's friends.

"Four we have," and the dauntless little sport smiled as blandly as ever. "This begins to grow interesting. Isn't there some one else who wants a little sport with me? Don't be bashful, pilgrims. Speak out; the more the merrier."

Then, to the surprise of every one, Toddy Bob crawled from beneath the table, where he had been lying since Big Hank hurled him there, and staggering to his feet, cried out, brokenly:

"I'm ernuther. Ther ole man's—hic!—drunk, but he's a little ole blizzard on ther—hic—fight. Whoop!"

"Oh! go soak yer head!" shouted Erastus Wagg, in disgust. "Give us a rest, or I'll come down there an' kick ye clean over into Kansas!"

"Cum down—hic—ef ye want to," retorted Bob, defiantly. "Cum down, an' I'll knock ye silly!"

"Knock yer gran'mother"—the woolly-headed man began, but Big Hank interrupted him by hoarsely shouting:

"Dry up thar, you two duffers! Close down onter yer jaw, or I'll putt er head onter ye both. W'e've got other business besides listenin' ter yer yawn."

"Correctly spoken," admitted Daisy Dare. "The arrangements are yet to be made for the little jamboree that is to take place. I am willing to meet the five gentlemen, and I will endeavor to give them all the amusement they want. All I ask for weapons is a single five-shot revolver—one of these," producing a pair of handsome weapons. "My antagonists may arm themselves as they please. We will fight in the street, and our first stations are to be taken at long pistol-range. After the word three, my foes are at liberty to advance toward me or I toward them as rapidly as we wish, firing as we please. The duel is only to end when one side or the other is down, or cries quits. How does that suit?"

"Good enuff!" asserted Angel Dare, delightedly. "I reckon one on us can down ye."

"Hooray!" shouted Erastus Wagg, excitedly. "Ther leetle Daisy from Denver fights ther hull five, an' I'm a-bettin' on his head. Yoop!"

"Gentlemen, we will now adjourn to the open air," announced Daisy Dare.

He then sprung down from the table, and, followed by the woolly-headed man and the excited crowd, made his way out into the street, where the unequal duel was to be fought.

CHAPTER VI.

WARREN KENT'S STORY.

WHEN Edna Greydon reached Roaring Bend she decided to stop at the White Horse Hotel while she remained in the camp; indeed, that was the only thing she could do for nowhere else in the camp could she have found accommodation. From what she had seen of them she had formed a very poor opinion of the hotels to be found in mining regions, but she hoped that the White Horse might prove an exceptional one.

Warren Kent also decided to stop at the White Horse, and he assisted Edna in securing a room, and as he parted with her, once more requested her to call on him if she needed aid at any time.

Edna was pleased to find that Joe Clark, the proprietor, was a good-natured appearing man. He used correct language, and in many ways showed himself to be a gentleman, and one who had, at one time in his life, at least, mingled with polite society.

"I fear you will find our accommodations poor, indeed, lady," were his words, as he stood before her, hat in hand; but you shall have the best the house can give. I will speak to my wife, and she will show you to your room."

A few moments later he introduced a little quiet-appearing woman to Edna.

"Wife," he said, "please show the lady her room, No. 2. It is the best in the house," to Edna, "and therefore the best we can give you."

The girl followed Mrs. Clark up the flight of stairs to a room in the front of the building.

"This is the best room in the house," said the landlord's wife, "but poor enough for a person of your tastes, I fear."

Edna found the apartment quite spacious, and also perceived, much to her surprise, that it was comfortably, though not elegantly furnished.

A carpet covered the floor; the rough board walls were hidden by gray curtains; there were a few pictures; also, a medium-sized mirror, two chairs, a small table and a bed, upon which was spread a neat white counterpane. In one corner of the room, hidden from her first glances by the partly opened door, she espied a wash-stand, upon which was a wash-bowl and pitcher.

"Oh, this is so much better than I expected!" her face lighting with pleasure. "Much better than I have found in many of the young mining-camps through which I have passed. This is truly cosey!"

Mrs. Clark smiled with pleasure.

"I am glad you like it. I fixed this room myself, and we keep it especially for our better class of visitors, and I assure you it is seldom used. But you must be tired after your long ride. Make yourself comfortable, and I will bring you refreshments, if you wish."

Edna thanked the little woman, who then retired and left the girl alone.

Edna removed her things, and after washing and brushing away the dust-stains of travel approached one of the windows and threw it open. Drawing a chair near, she sat down and looked out upon the little camp.

The sun had already sunk behind the western mountains so far that its light failed to shi down into the gulch where Roaring Bend w situated; but it still illuminated the eastern peak with a mellow, golden glow.

She glanced over the little collection of rough shanties, and, for the greater part, dirty canva tents, which comprised the camp, and four the place similar to other mining-strikes throu which she had passed.

Roaring Creek rushed and foamed along over its bed, its course being directly through nearly the center of the camp. The White Horse Hotel and Black Dragon Saloon were upon the western side of the stream, as were also nearly al the other places of "business." The large number of private shanties and tents were also upon the other side.

Edna remained at the window until Mr. Clark returned with the refreshments.

In a few moments the genial landlady had the victuals arranged upon the little table, and to Edna the food, though plain, looked tempting, with the clean dishes, white table-cloth and napkins.

"Now," said the landlady, as she poured out a cup of fragrant coffee, "sit down and eat an drink, for I know you must be hungry. The coffee will stimulate you, and I am sure tha you need something of the kind after your tir some journey."

Edna was hungry, and was only too glad partake of the food. At the girl's request, Mr. Clark remained, and the two chatted pleasantl and, in a few moments, almost familiarly.

Finally Mrs. Clark retired, taking the dish and the remains of the meal with her.

Barely had the echoes of the landlady's scudding footsteps as she passed down the st ceased to be heard by the girl, when there ca a low knock upon the door.

She started, a sudden feeling of fear sweep over her. It was several moments before could summon sufficient courage to open door. When she did, she found, with a fe of relief, that it was Warren Kent wh rapped.

Hat in hand, the man bowed respectfull she appeared.

"Pardon me, Miss Greydon," he said, smooth tones, "but I feel that I cannot the time of making a revelation to you wh of import."

He pause, and with a voice in which s ite herself, there was a perceptible tre ring he invited him in. She gave him a chair he sat down near the center of the room, holding his hat, although she offered to ta and

Edna sat down in a chair a little re from the open window, and involuntarily ed one hand upon her bosom to still her heart, which was wildly throbbing, she knew not why. Anxiously she waited for the man to speak.

Kent's eyes seemed to avoid Edna's appealing glances of inquiry, and placing one hand over his mouth, he coughed in a short, uneasy way. He seemed about to speak, yet hesitated.

Finally, the girl managed to ask, falteringly:

"My father—you have come to speak of him?"

"Yes," replied Kent, "I thought it best to tell you the truth at once. For various reasons I did not tell you all that I knew on the stage to-day. One thing, there were too many listeners."

"Then you know something of him—you re

member?" she cried, eagerly, yet fearing to hear the words which she felt he would speak.

"Yes, I know something of him—enough to make the task before me an unpleasant one."

"He is dead!"

Her lips formed the words, yet, sitting within a few feet of her, he could scarcely hear them.

Not daring to trust his own voice just then, Warren Kent bowed his head, and for several moments both were silent.

At last she said, slowly:

"Tell me the story."

"It is a short one," he began; "I can tell you all in a few moments. You must not think it strange that I did not tell you when you asked me to-day if I had known your father. The story I have to tell should be heard by your ears only."

"I first met your father in Denver, about a year ago. At that time he knew nothing of the lost gold *cache*, but many of the vague rumors concerning it had come to my ears. I was crazy to form a party and go in search for the lost treasure; but, when I broached the scheme to Mr. Greydon, he laughed at me. He had no faith in the project and frankly told me that he considered the stories concerning the hidden gold-cave all falsehoods, put in circulation, probably, by some half-drunk miner or prospector. But I had faith in the story, and resolved to try my fortune in a search for the *cache*.

"A month later found me, with two companions, searching in this vicinity for the lost *cache*. But my companions soon became disheartened, and we made our way to the nearest camp. There my companions quietly told me that they had lost their faith in the wild story of the hidden treasure. This left me alone, but resolved not to give up the search, for my faith was still unshaken. It was some time, however, before I could muster sufficient courage to again strike out alone into the mountains.

"One night I pitched my tent in a little pocket, not many miles from this camp. I had built a fire and was preparing my supper, when a faint cry was borne to my ears by the breeze. I listened intently until I heard it repeated, then I picked up my rifle and started to find what it meant.

"I had not gone far when I came upon a man lying upon the ground. I soon found that the stranger was wounded and nearly unconscious. I lifted and carried him back to my camp, where I hastily examined his wounds. I found a knife-thrust in the left side, and a bullet-hole in the back, under the right shoulder. The man's clothes were torn in shreds, and his face was covered with blood and dirt."

The narrator covered his face with his hands, though to shut out some unpleasant vision, and a perceptible shudder shook his frame.

Edna uttered not a word, but her lips were pressed firmly together, her hands tightly clenched, and her breath came short and quick.

"When I had dressed the poor fellow's wounds," resumed Kent, "I sought to arouse him from the semi-unconscious state in which he was. I poured a few drops of liquor into his mouth, and washed the dirt from his face. Then, for the first time, to my surprise and horror, I smothered that the wounded man was Lewis Greydon."

Morgan Kent paused, but if he expected the thairning girl to cry out or show strong signs of repulsion, he was disappointed. She only sat there, silent, before him, her hands tightly clasped, and the steady gaze of her large eyes fixed upon him.

Ready the daylight was dying slowly, and a heavy gloom was gathering in the room. Kent sat back from the window, and the expression on his face was entirely concealed by his dark beard and the shadows within the room.

His voice sounded strained and unpleasant as he continued:

After a time, I succeeded in restoring Mr. Greydon to consciousness. He was surprised and overjoyed to find me bending over him, but was in eager haste to tell me his story, for he declared that he was dying. Indeed, he had lost enough blood to have drained the veins of a man less strong and healthy.

"He told me how, a short time after I had spoken to him in Denver concerning the lost gold *cache*, he had befriended an Indian who had been wounded in a bar-room encounter, and how, in his gratitude, the red-skin had given him a map which he claimed would reveal the cave where the gold was concealed. The Indian had appeared so honest in the declaration that the map would surely reveal the place

where the lost treasure was hidden that Mr. Greydon became interested, even enthusiastic, and resolved to go in search for the *cache*. He tried to find me, but, as I had left Denver, he failed. He was, therefore, compelled to let another person into the secret, and agreed to share equally should the lost treasure be found. The name of Mr. Greydon's partner was Horace Duncan.

"Your father and Duncan came to this part of the country, and with the aid of the map, began a systematic search for the *cache*. At last they considered themselves upon the eve of a discovery. Then they quarreled over the map. Duncan tried to snatch the precious paper from Mr. Greydon, but only succeeded in tearing it in two, your father desperately clinging to one half. Duncan sprung fiercely upon him and struck him with a knife. Mr. Greydon broke away and ran for his life, but the villain pursued and shot him in the back. Still the wounded man did not fall, but with desperate energy, ran on. He could not tell how he escaped. He could only remember the horror of rushing, tripping, falling, bruising his hands and body, tearing his clothes, but still scrambling and hurrying on, expecting each moment to feel the assassin's knife in the back. Finally everything reeled around him, and he fell to the ground unconscious.

"When his senses came back to him, he saw my camp-fire, and had barely strength enough to shout faintly twice, when he again became partly unconscious. In his hand he still grasped one-half of the precious map. This he gave me, and barely had he done so, when he began talking and raving incoherently. All the long night I watched beside him, bathing his hot head and doing all that I could to calm and restore him to his natural self. But all my efforts were unavailing. All night long he talked wildly of the gold *cache*, his wife and daughter, and home; and just as the light of dawn began to touch the eastern sky, he breathed his last."

The man ceased speaking, and, bowing her head upon her hands, the girl remained silent for some time. Finally she looked up, speaking with a sob:

"My poor father—did he send no message to mother and me?"

"No," replied Warren Kent, slowly shaking his head, "no message. He never spoke of either in reason, but his ravings were of you both. From his talk I tried to gain some clew of the whereabouts of the dear wife and sweet daughter of whom he raved, but I failed. And when he died I found nothing upon his person which would assist me in that direction. I buried him upon the spot where he died, and as soon as I came to the conclusion that, with no information other than what I had, it would be worse than useless to attempt to find his wife and daughter, I began, with the assistance of the incomplete map, to again search for the lost treasure. To this day I have continued searching, but as yet I have not been successful."

"And you allowed my father's murderer—the vile assassin—to escape!" cried Edna wildly, springing to her feet. "You cared more for the gold than for bringing the dastard—the vile creature who had murdered your friend—to justice! Bah! What contemptable creatures some men are!"

He shrunk from her in alarm. This outburst was so strange, so violent, and withal, so unlike anything expected. He knew not what to say or do, and could only sit there and gaze at her in amazement.

For a few moments she stood before him, her hands clinched and her whole form trembling with emotion. Then she suddenly covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

"Forgive me! forgive me!" she sobbed. "I know not what I say! I am nearly crazed. I did not mean those words—forgive me."

He arose to his feet, but she motioned him away, saying brokenly, between her sobs:

"I will see you again, Mr. Kent. Leave me, now, for I would be alone."

Once more assuring her of his friendship and of his willingness to assist her in any possible way, Warren Kent passed from the room, leaving the girl alone with her grief.

CHAPTER VII.

A STRANGE DUEL.

OUT of the Black Dragon Saloon into the street poured the crowd, eager to witness the strange duel—five against one.

To some it did not seem possible that the little sport from Denver would face five foes, each one of whom was to be fully armed, while he held but one five-shot revolver. But that

was just what Daisy Dare intended to do. Confident in his own ability with either rifle or revolver, he was more than confident now, seeing that each and every one of his foes were more or less under the influence of liquor. Big Hank and his two companions, Holy Joe and Angel Dave, had been drinking heavily. Toddy Bob was apparently as drunk as usual, and as for Long John, his breath was decidedly "balmy."

Taking these facts into consideration, it will be seen that the yellow-haired sport was not so foolhardy as might at first be supposed.

As for Erastus Wagg, he too seemed confident that the little sport would successfully cope with his foes. The woolly-headed man was in splendid spirits, and as soon as he reached the street, proceeded to relieve his pent-up feelings by emitting several shrill whoops.

"Set 'em up erg'in, Mary Ann!" he shouted. "Right this way, gentlemen! Hyar's whar ye kin clap yer peepers onto the original an' only yeller-haired daisy frum Denver, an' I'm a-bettin' two ter one onto his head ag'in' the five. Whar's ther gerloot as is takin' me?"

But no one paid the slightest attention to the loud-lunged individual with the woolly-head. The crowd was too much interested in the expected duel to make particular note of the brawler.

Preparations were rapidly made for the encounter. The little sport simply delivered up his weapons with the exception of a single five-shot revolver. But Daisy Dare was shrewd enough to place his weapons in the hands of his enthusiastic admirer, Erastus Wagg. For some reason, he seemed to feel that Wagg would return them promptly upon demand.

The sport then selected a man whom he desired should give the signal to fire. The person selected being unknown to the citizens, as well as to Dare, no objections were raised. This individual was Warren Kent, who, attracted by the commotion, had just joined the crowd.

The duelists then took their stations. It was a strange sight to see the one small, smiling man, armed with a single revolver, resolutely face his five foes, four of whom held a revolver in either hand. Toddy Bob was the only one not thus doubly armed.

Although Big Hank objected, the old toper insisted on taking a hand in the duel. Finally, the rough consented, at the same time expressing a wish that the sport might "salt him fer keeps, fu'st off."

Drawing a revolver from some hidden pocket in his ragged garments, Toddy Bob reeled into line with the roughs and faced the daisy sport.

Warren Kent advanced a pace in front of the spectators, and addressed the duelists:

"Are you ready, gentlemen?"

A hoarse murmur of assent came from the line of roughs, while Daisy Dare simply bowed.

"As I understand this affair," said Kent, "after the word 'three,' either side is at liberty to advance toward the other, firing whenever they choose. The duel is to end when one side falls, or cries quits. Am I right?"

Both parties "allowed" that he was.

"Ready, then!"

It was an impressive tableau. There in the moonlit street were the five duelists, with cocked and ready revolvers, eager to get the first shot at the little sport, and he, with bared head and folded arms, a quiet smile on his face, carelessly waiting for the signal. At one side, with a cocked revolver in his hand, was Warren Kent, and a little back the expectant crowd, with the excited woolly-headed man to the front.

"One, two, three! Go!" shouted Kent.

Simultaneously with the word *three*, five revolvers spoke; but the distance between the five duelists and their foe was long, and at the signal the sport had leaped swiftly sideways, therefore, fortunately, he was untouched by the leaden ball that flew past him.

Instantly Daisy Dare bounded swiftly forward, at which the excited roughs discharged their weapons rapidly, but not until he had covered half the distance did the sport pause. Then he stopped suddenly, and flinging up the hand which held the self-cocking revolver, Daisy Dare fired five shots in such rapid succession that the reports seemed almost blended into one.

A yell of delight pealed from the woolly-headed man's lips as he saw the sport's five foes go down almost as one man.

"Whoop-ee!" squealed Wagg, dancing up and down with delight. "Didn't I tolle yer? Knowned he w'u'd do et! All down; set 'em up erg'in!"

Instantly Daisy Dare turned and walked

quietly back toward Erastus Wagg, who held his weapons.

A shout of applause came from the crowd. The little sport had won the admiration of two-thirds of those who witnessed the duel.

The unfortunate duelists lay where they had fallen, some groaning dismally, and some remaining ominously silent. Several persons left the crowd and approached the fallen men.

"Ther cussid leetle hound!" groaned Angel Dave, as he lay flat upon his back. "He's stove my leg all ter pieces!"

"Mine, too," declared Long John, with a fierce oath. "I'll hev his heart's blood fer this!"

Holy Joe said not a word, but struggled up upon one elbow, and, still grasping a revolver with his right hand, glared around in search for the victorious sport. But, Daisy Dare, although near at hand, could not be seen, for the crowd was now pressing around the wounded men.

Suddenly there came a sharp cry, and a female pressed her way forward, and, dropping beside the silent form of Toddy Bob, lifted the head of the old toper and gazed wildly into his face.

The soft, white moonlight falling upon the woman's face and form showed her to be young and not unattractive. In fact, her face, now marked by a look of ghastly horror and fear as she bent over the ragged old man, seemed strangely beautiful to the startled throng whose eyes were fastened upon her.

The moonlight falling upon the long, yellow hair which flowed loosely down her back made it seem like threads of gleaming gold. Her hands and the arms exposed by the short-sleeved dress appeared as white as the purest marble.

For a moment the woman gazed into the face of the bummer, then, turning to the crowd, she wildly cried:

"Who did this? My poor old father! He is killed! He is dead!"

No one spoke. The crowd seemed awed into silence by the wild despair of her voice.

"Who did this?" she again demanded. "Speak, men! Tell me who is the wretch who thus shot down this poor old man! He is dead—dead!"

"I think not, lady," quietly spoke the sport from Denver, as he stepped forward. "This affair was forced upon me by those five men. I was obliged to face them; but in no case did I shoot to kill. This one is simply 'creased,' as I think you will find. If so, I will pledge you he will be all right to-morrow."

"And you shot him down?" she asked, in a cold, hard tone.

"Unfortunately, as I before stated, I was forced into this unpleasant affair."

"Then hear me!" she cried, uplifting her right hand and holding it above her head. "If he dies, I swear by the Heaven above us to have your life in return!"

The absolute silence that followed her words was broken by a wild, maniacal laugh, that chilled the blood of those who heard it; then the madman so often seen around Roaring Bend came plunging through the crowd, and seizing Warren Kent by the throat hurled him to the ground.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the wild creature, as he fell upon Kent, wildly grasping and scratching at the man's throat. "Die, you demon—die! Vengeance is mine! Ah-ha!"

CHAPTER VIII.

AN UNMASKING.

SNARLING and growling like a wild animal, the madman grasped and tore at the throat of the fallen man, who cried aloud in terror:

"Help! help! For Heaven's sake don't let him murder me! Help!"

Suddenly the madman grasped Kent's long beard and tore it from his face! The countenance revealed was that of Martin Reno!

Then a miner seized the crazy creature by the shoulders, and dragged him from his victim, at the same time shouting to those around:

"Look out fer Reno! Don't let 'im slip ye!"

Several hands seized Reno and lifted him to his feet, where he stood, trembling in every limb, yet making no attempt to escape. His eyes were fastened upon the madman, and in their depths was a look of haunted fear.

The maniac tore himself from the grasp of the miner, and was about to spring upon Martin Reno again, when a shrill female shriek rang out.

Looking upward, the crowd beheld the white face of Edna Greydon, who was leaning out of one of the upper windows of the White Horse Hotel. It was she who had uttered the wild cry!

A moment later, the madman tore his way

through the crowd, and, ere a hand could stop him, dashed away down the street, soon disappearing.

"Go it, legs!" yelled Erastus Wagg, as he watched the maniac's retreating figure. "If I was betting on foot-races, I'd stake my wealth on his head," he added to the crowd.

Martin Reno now sought to shake off the hands that held him.

"No, you don't!" exclaimed one of the men. "We have you fast this time, and we mean to hold our grip."

"Let go, curse you!" cried Reno, angrily. "You have no right to detain me! Hands off!"

But they still held fast, and one said, firmly:

"It's no use, my man; you may as well submit. There is a charge against you, made by a dying man, and this matter must be settled. I should advise you to take things easy."

"But the charge against me is false! This is an outrage!" stormed Reno.

"If you can prove that the charge is false, all will be well for you. If not—"

The speaker broke off of his own accord, and shook his head, grimly.

"But what right have you to detain me—by what authority?"

"The camp is yet an infant," retorted the one who had before spoken, "and has no regularly elected officers of the law; but I am thinking in this case the citizens will take the law in their own hands. Eh, pards?"

A hoarse murmur of approval came from the crowd.

"That settles it," continued the speaker. "You will be given a fair trial, Reno. I reckon we'll have to shut you up for the night. We'll attend to your case in the morning."

"But the idea that I am Scarlet Mask is simply ridiculous!" declared the prisoner, hotly. "Why, the outlaw-chief appeared with his followers at the same time you held me captive, with a rope around my neck. That is enough to prove that I am not the scarlet-faced robber."

But the crowd would not listen, and despite all that Reno could say, he was hurried away to a cabin, where he was left, a prisoner, bound hand and foot.

Meanwhile, the strange girl who had called Toddy Bob father had enlisted the service of three men, who lifted the unconscious man and bore him away.

The girl's last words to Daisy Dare were:

"Remember, I have sworn if my father dies to have your life!"

The sport could hardly conceal his habitual smile, as he bowed politely, at the same time saying:

"Under the circumstances, lady, I feel quite safe. I am sincerely sorry that it was necessary for me to quiet him in order to protect myself. It may be difficult for you to appreciate the unavoidable position in which I was placed, but—"

Dare ceased speaking, for she had turned from him, and was now walking haughtily away.

"She didn't stop ter hear ther hull on yer lector, did she, pard?" remarked the woolly-headed man, as he sidled toward the spot, grinning broadly. "Reckon she was in sumwhat of er hurry. Pr'aps she hed'n engagement that called her away."

Daisy Dare extended his hand to his eccentric friend, saying:

"Allow me to thank you for the interest you have shown for my welfare. When I was accused of being crooked, I believe you were the first to express a belief that I was square."

"Oh, that's all right!" assured Wagg, as he grasped the extended hand and shook it heartily. "I kin generally tell er white man by ther look o' him. You show white all over. I'd be willin' ter stake all ther wealth I c'u'd borry that ye war square."

"Thanks," smiled the sport.

"But say, pard, looker hyer, I got er leetle suthin' as I want ter whisky in yer ear," and Wagg mysteriously drew the man from Denver away from the crowd.

"Kin ye lend me er dollar?" anxiously interrogated the woolly-headed man, as soon as they were so far away that there was little danger of any one hearing his words. "I'm mighty hard up jest now. Lost all mer ducats onto four kings. Other fellow hed four aces, durn' im fer luck!"

Laughing, the sport drew a silver dollar from his pocket and handed it to Wagg, who grasped it eagerly, at the same time ducking his woolly head and grinning with pleasure.

"Thankee, pard, thankee! Jist mark this down on yer 'count ag'in' Erastus Wagg, Esq.,

an' remember this: I'm an' honest man; I'd ruther owe er man er dollar all mer life than cheat him out of fifty cents."

"If you are dry," said Dare, "come into the White Horse with me, and you shall have what you want."

"Thankee ag'in. You're gen'rus, pard, durned gen'rus; but I never imbibe, except on state occasions. Whisky allus makes me tired since I tried ter hole up my eend wi' er nevvy of mine who belongs 'way down east in Maine. He's small, but he's er good one! He drinked me blind in erbout half-a-nour, an' that made me so sick o' licker that I seldom tetch it now."

"Well, come into the hotel. I want to talk with you."

"Kirect. Lead on, Macduff; I'll foller thee."

Ten minutes later they were seated in a private room of the hotel, with a small table between them upon which was a lamp, a bottle of wine and two glasses.

"I seldom drink anything myself," remarked the sport, as he dexterously broke off the neck of the bottle; "but just now I feel prompted to take something. The landlord tells me that this wine is a rare old article, secured for his own use; but, upon consideration, he consented to part with one bottle. Under the circumstances, I think you will consent to drink with me."

Wagg consented, in fact, he emptied his glass with eager haste. Daisy Dare turned out a glassful and raised it to his lips, but he barely tasted of it. The woolly-headed man drank several glasses while the sport was daintily sipping one.

The man from Denver soon became convinced that the suspicion he had entertained that there was something about the eccentric Erastus that did not appear upon the surface was correct. He felt certain that, if the woolly-headed man did not drink liquor, it was not because he disliked it, but because his better judgment forbade him doing so.

Wagg gradually became more and more talkative. It did not take the man from Denver long to learn all that Erastus knew about Roaring Bend and its inhabitants. He learned many things concerning the outlaw, Scarlet Mask, and his raids on the camp. The stage-driver had told him of how Martin Reno had been accused of being the outlaw-chief, and how near the camp came to hanging Reno. Also how Scarlet Mask had appeared, and the condemned man had escaped. Wagg assured the sport that all the driver had told him was true.

"But this Reno cannot be Scarlet Mask," asserted Dare. "Why, Scarlet Mask appeared with his men at the very time that the citizens were about to hang Reno."

"Thet ain't no proof," declared the woolly-headed man. "Ef Reno was ther outlaw, it would be an easy trick fer one o' his men ter dress in his togs an' appear wi' t'other pirates just as they war goin' ter hang their chief. Thet would be an easy way o' makin' ther camp believe that it war elevatin' ther wrong paloot An' ef it warn't ter resky Reno, what fer did ther outlaws ride through ther camp?"

"Well, they have this Reno in durance again."

"In durance—no they ain't," averred Erastus, promptly. "They put him in Josh Brown's cabin."

"Who was that strange girl who claimed the old drunkard as her father?" questioned the sport, as he again filled Wagg's glass.

"She? Well, now, pard, I ain't been hangin' round this camp but a few days, but I've heerd that she is ther ole man's gal. They live about half-er-mile out a piece. She's er stunner, now ain't she, pard?"

"She is certainly not a common-appearing person," admitted Dare.

They conversed for a while longer; then Wagg, who had drank the last of the wine, arose, and after repeated adieus, departed.

After taking a look out into the now deserted street, the man from Denver sought his room, and retired for the night.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TABLES TURNED.

UPON the following morning, the citizens of Roaring Bend discovered that their prisoner, Martin Reno, had escaped. The four guards who had been placed over the prisoner, with instructions to warn the camp if a rescue was attempted, were all found apparently wrapped in a drunken slumber. Upon the floor of Brown's cabin were found the ropes that had bound the prisoner, and examination showed that they had been severed by a keen knife. Moved by the light morning breeze, the open cabin-door

creaked as it swung on its hinges, plainly telling the first who saw it that something was wrong.

Vigorous efforts finally aroused Josh Brown, the owner of the cabin, so that he partially opened his eyes, growled out an oath, then rolled over deliberately, with the intention of finishing his broken nap. But at about this juncture, a bucket of cool water from a spring near by was dashed over Brown, and he suddenly sat up, swearing vigorously, and declaring that he would "shoot the daylights outen sumbuddy!"

"Where's the prisoner?" demanded one of the miners.

"Pris'ner—w'at pris'ner?" asked Brown, blankly.

"Why, the prisoner! Drat your thick head! what's become of him?"

"Don't know nuthin' 'bout yer blamed ole pris'ner?" was the angry reply, as Brown began to fumble with the butt of a revolver. "You fellers git out. W'at yer round hyer 'sturbin' an' hones' man fer?"

But they finally succeeded in making Brown understand. His story was substantially as follows:

The four guards had been playing old sledge within the cabin, with the prisoner lying upon the floor, firmly bound, when they heard some one singing outside. One of them looked out, and saw a man who was evidently intoxicated go reeling by, shouting and singing. A few steps beyond the cabin the man staggered and fell. He made no attempt to arise, and, approaching him, the guard found that he was apparently in a drunken sleep. In one of his pockets a bottle, partly emptied, was found. The guards secured the bottle, and quickly disposed of its contents. Brown declared that, after that, he did not seem to "remember much o' anything a tall."

It at once became evident that the liquor had been drugged, and that a scheme for rescuing the prisoner had been quietly but successfully carried out. To many this seemed proof conclusive that Martin Reno, if not Scarlet Mask, was, at least, one of Scarlet Mask's followers.

"Escaped, eh?" muttered the sport from Denver, when he heard the news. "That looks suspicious. It is probable that the outlaws had a hand in this affair, and if so, Reno must either be their chief, or one of their number. If he is their chief, then why the warning from Scarlet Mask that I received yesterday? If he is their chief, I am on the wrong scent, and Hubert Dawes has again given me the slip. But it cannot be."

Later, Dare met Edna Greydon. She stopped and said:

"Pray pardon me, sir, but did you not come to this camp yesterday on the stage from Bolter's Bar?"

Now Edna well knew that the handsome sport had been on the stage. In fact, she had noticed that it was he who had courteously surrendered his seat within the stage to her at Bolter's Bar. But as he was an entire stranger to her, it was necessary that she should approach him as such.

Dare lifted his hat and bowed, as he replied:

"I did, madame."

Do you remember the gentleman with a long brown beard, who got aboard the stage at Bolter's Bar?"

"I do."

"Have you seen him to-day? Can you tell me where he is? I wish to speak with him."

"I am sorry to say that, at present, I cannot tell where the gentleman is. I believe that the brown beard that he wore proved to be false, and that he was a person wanted in this camp on the charge of being an outlaw. Last night he was taken prisoner, but he succeeded in escaping before morning."

Edna was much surprised by this news.

"Oh, it can't be!" she exclaimed. "There is some mistake. It must be that we mean two different persons."

"I think not. I noticed the brown-bearded gentleman as he assisted you to alight from the stage. He registered as Warren Kent. I saw the beard torn from his face last night by a crazy man. Thus unmasked, he proved to be a man well known in this camp, and who was charged with being an outlaw."

"A crazy man!" she cried, eagerly. "Was it the strange, bareheaded man whom, from the window of my room, I saw in the midst of the crowd in the street below?"

"I think it must have been, for I saw you looking from the window while he was in the midst of the crowd."

"Oh! who was he? Do you know him?"

"I am a stranger here, therefore I know nothing about him. Probably some of the people

who belong here could inform you concerning him. The proprietor of this hotel, or his wife, perhaps, might be able to give you information."

With a parting word of thanks she left him to find the landlord's wife. Dare watched her as she moved away, a light of admiration shining in his blue eyes.

"By Jove!" he mentally exclaimed. "She is the most bewitching woman I ever met! She is one of those whom a man would fight, ay, even die for!"

It happened that the woolly-headed man had witnessed Dare's meeting with Edna. He now approached the sport, grinning broadly.

"Been havin' er leetle teeter-teeter, hey?" remarked Erastus. "Thet thar's er mighty stunnin' lookin' female, I'm a-shoutin'."

The sport smiled and nodded to his comical friend.

"How do ye find yerself this beauiful morn?" inquired Wagg. "Have ye heerd ther latest news?"

"I have heard that the prisoner has escaped."

"Thet war w'at I war 'ludin' at. He kinder got tired loafin' round these hyer parts, an' so, in ther night, like an Arab, he arose, silently folded his wigwam and ambled peacefully away."

"So it appears. Have you any remark to make concerning his departure?"

"Waal," drawled Erastus, as he soberly scratched his head. "I mought hev, then ag'in, I moughtn't. His being helped out o' ther scrape ther way he was looks kinder 'spicious. He mought of hed frien's among ther people of this hyer camp as helped him out; but ef he's got any frien's hyer as would 'a' did ther job, I fail to find 'em out. It looks as ef he hed help frum outside galoots, an' ef *that's* so, they must 'a' bin Scarlet Mask's outlaws."

"Your talk is logical," acknowledged the sport, as he produced some cigars. "Ever smoke?"

"Occasionally I am reckless enough to indulge; but it's bin er long day since I last gripped the graceful eend o' a cigar with mer delicate molars. Thankee."

The woolly-headed man "borrowed" a match and lighted his cigar. Each smoking a fragrant weed, together he and Dare left the hotel and strolled away toward the outskirts of the camp.

It was a strange sight to see the homely, ragged, woolly-headed man and the handsome, elegantly-attired sport together. Many amused glances were turned upon them.

"Beauiful day, pard," observed Wagg, gracefully waving one huge hand toward the blue sky, and pulling vigorously at his cigar, which he held in his mouth, elevated at an angle of nearly forty-five degrees.

"Very fine," replied Daisy Dare.

Conversing, they strolled on a short distance down the gulch, till finally Erastus announced that he had "idled away" enough time, and must attend to a little business he had on hand. He turned back toward the camp, while the sport continued his walk.

In a thoughtful mood, Dare wandered heedlessly away down the gulch, idly pulling at his cigar. He heeded not how far he strayed, until his foot striking sharply against a stone aroused him to a sense of his surroundings.

He glanced quickly around to find himself alone, far away from the camp, with no person in sight. He was about to retrace his steps, when, happening to glance upward, he espied a cabin far above, built upon the very verge of a narrow, projecting cliff.

"Hullo!" exclaimed the sport, at the same time giving vent to a little whistle of surprise. "That's a strange place for a nest—a cabin in the air, truly. I wonder how the people who live there get to the cot?"

He seated himself upon a small boulder, and, idly smoking, gazed up at the little cabin, wondering who lived there.

"It is a puzzle to me," he soliloquized aloud, "whether the people who abide in that cabin fly up or fall down to it. It may be that a footpath runs along the narrow, projecting ledge."

A footstep sounded near at hand, and he turned quickly to find himself confronted by a stranger, who was silently gazing at him along the barrel of a light rifle.

The stranger seemed to be a mere youth, with a supple, rounded form, dressed from head to foot in somber black. His face was concealed by a mask.

For a moment the two gazed into each other's eyes, then the mask spoke calmly, sternly, yet with a voice which sounded soft and musical:

"Hands up and empty! Don't attempt to

draw a weapon, unless you are tired of breathing!"

Although the sport was "chain-lightning on the draw," he realized that the rifle held by the stranger covered his heart and could easily be discharged ere he could pull a revolver. At once comprehending the situation, the man from Denver did the wisest thing possible.

"Up they go," he laughed, as he flung aside the cigar stub and raised his hands above his head. "You have the drop on me in beautiful style, but if you happen to be looking for cash, I fear you will be disappointed."

"Money is no object in this case," was the reply. "Your life is what I am after!"

The sport gave a brief whistle, indicative of great surprise.

"Well, well! this affair is a trifle more serious than I at first imagined!" but the quiet smile still lingered on his face.

"You are at the end of your rope, you human bloodhood!" hissed the youth. "I shall kill you with as little hesitation as though you were a dog! You will die in an instant!"

"An easy way to shuffle off this mortal coil," remarked the yellow-haired sport, quietly. "A crooking of the finger, a report, and the deed is done. But what for heaven's sake can you have against me that you wish to send my spirit floating across the Stygian river?"

"It can make but little difference to you. Enough that you are a foe to me and mine. While you live, we are not safe. You must die! If you know any prayers, repeat them."

"So help me, I cannot think of a single one. Oh, yes—'Now I lay me.' Do you think that will fit the occasion?"

"You may trifile," cried the mask, angrily, "but you will find this no trifling affair! I mean business, and you shall die when I count three!"

"For goodness' sake, be as long counting as you possibly can!" exclaimed Dare; but despite his words he still smiled as sweetly as ever.

"You cannot be too long to please me."

"One!" began the mask, firmly. "Two!"

But ere the fatal three could be uttered, the sport, who seemed to be looking directly over the speaker's shoulder, cried out sharply:

"Shoot him, Tom! shoot him down!"

It was an old ruse, but for a moment it disconcerted the mask, and in that moment Daisy Dare leaped forward, and thrust the rifle aside just as the piece was discharged.

Then he grasped the apparent youth by the throat, and hurled him to the ground, at the same time tearing away the mask and thrusting a revolver against the forehead of the would-be assassin?

CHAPTER X.

A STRANGE WOMAN.

"WHOA up!" exclaimed the yellow-haired sport, as he thrust a revolver into the unmasked face. "Thus you see the tables are turned. Everything is uncertain in this world. First you're up, then you're down."

Daisy Dare was not in the least surprised when he saw that the face revealed was a woman's. Almost as soon as his eyes had rested upon the masked figure, he had decided that it was a female. He now saw that she was the same strange-appearing girl who had claimed Toddy Bob as father.

She did not struggle, but lay still, regarding him with deep-blue eyes, in the depths of which glowed a burning look of undying hatred.

The sport observed a revolver in her belt. This he relieved her of, tossing it over behind the boulder upon which he had been sitting. The light rifle followed the revolver, then he thrust his own revolver carelessly into one of the side pockets of his coat, and lifted the unmasked woman to her feet.

"I beg pardon for my rudeness," smiled the man from Denver; "but under the circumstances, I think, you will condescend to forgive me."

She made no reply, but stood facing him, her hands tightly clinched and her whole form tremble with suppressed emotion.

Daisy Dare drew forth another cigar, and after daintily biting off the end, quietly produced a match and lit it, scarcely glancing at the woman the while. Finally he looked up, removing the cigar from his mouth, and saying carelessly:

"I hope that my rather harsh actions have not so shocked you as to cause a loss of the power of speech. I am truly sorry that I was forced into such rudeness; but I fear that, had I hesitated, I would now be roaming in that land where sorrow is unknown. It may appear

a trifle strange, but I prefer to hustle around over this earthly plane a short time longer. I am not anxious to become an angel too suddenly, and I am willing to play high on the belief that as yet not even a pin-feather has sprouted on my person, and I am confident that one cannot find a wing concealed about me."

"You have escaped death this time," spoke the woman, with an evident attempt at calmness, "but you will not always be so fortunate."

"I reckon it is gospel truth that you are giving me now. A fellow can't expect to dodge the keen sickle of the grim destroyer; but then, you see, I mean to dodge the old fellow as long as possible. When I find that he holds the winning hand, I shall surrender the game as gracefully as I can."

"What do you propose to do, now that you hold me in your power?"

The daisy sport blew a wreath of smoke toward the blue sky ere he replied:

"Do with you, dear lady? Why, I do not propose to do anything with you. I assure you I hold no grudge, for I think you must have made a mistake in attempting to cash my checks. You probably mistook me for another person."

The woman laughed bitterly, as she retorted:

"I made no mistake. You are the bloodhound whose life I sought! You are the bitterest foe of me and mine. It is well for you that you succeeded in disarming me as you did."

"But, as the old tars say, shiver my timbers if I can recall your face. I am sure I never saw you before last night, and how I can possibly be your enemy is something that gets me."

"It makes little difference whether you know me or not. I know you. You have come to this camp like a hound on the scent; you will never go away alive!"

"It may be that you have power to foretell the future, yet I hardly took you for a Gipsy fortune-teller. You appear more like a *lady*."

"Enough of that!" she cried scornfully. "Do not tax your brain to think of weak compliments to bestow upon me, or you will win my contempt as well as my hatred."

The sport laughed lightly.

"It appears that flattery is not a dish suited to your taste," he observed. "Very well; I will try and guard my tongue more closely in the future. But, by the way, how is the aged party who unfortunately ran against a bit of lead from one of my guns?"

"He is alive; no thanks to you, however. If the bullet had been sent an inch lower, my poor father would have been killed."

"I assure you that the lead went exactly where I intended that it should. I did not mean to kill the old gentleman; I only wanted to knock him out of the fray."

The woman uttered an exclamation of scornful disbelief.

"You doubt my word," continued Dave, quietly. "Well, the only proof that I have is the plain fact that *none* of the five men who confronted me were killed, although they were all hit just hard enough to knock them out. If I had wished, I could have killed them with ease."

"So you say, but that is no proof. It makes little difference as long as my father escaped death at your blood-stained hands."

"Well, suppose we let that affair rest," proposed the sport, who, in blowing out a wreath of smoke, had again noticed the cabin on the cliff. "I have a curiosity to know who lives up there. Can you tell me?"

"That is my father's cabin."

"Whew! So-so! I declare, I should think that the old gentleman would be afraid of taking an unpleasant tumble from up there. Upon some occasion, when he had been breathing this exhilarating mountain air, he might become so elevated that he would walk directly off over the edge and bring up down here with a bump."

The woman stood nervously tapping the ground with one small foot, but did not deign to reply to the sport's bantering words.

Daisy Dare stood a few moments, leisurely smoking and regarding the woman with critical eyes. In a measure, he was anxious to know who she was and why she considered him her foe. The longer he surveyed her features the firmer became the belief that he had never seen her before the previous night. But he resolved to try a ruse to discover if he was right.

He suddenly started forward, exclaiming:

"Ah! your face! It comes back to me now! Strange that I did not remember before!"

She started back, her face for a moment turning very white.

"What do you mean?" she faltered.

"You can not deceive me. I ought to know you anywhere. How blind I have been!"

Gradually the look of surprise and fear faded from her face, and finally she flung out one hand with a contemptuous laugh.

"Bah!" she cried. "Do not attempt to deceive me with trickery. You do not know me, save as you may have learned of me since you came to Roaring Bend. It is easy to penetrate your shallow strategy."

The daisy sport laughed lightly; but the realization came to him that, although he had accomplished his ends in one respect, he stood face to face with a clear-headed, keen-sighted woman, whom it would be difficult to deceive with any weak device.

"You think I do not know you? Very well; I will neither claim that I do o' do not. It is the proper thing, I suppose, not to buck against a lady in anything."

"Well then, give me my weapons, and I will depart."

"There! I have to break the rule so soon. You attempted to take my life once; if I gave you the chance, you might repeat the attempt, and succeed."

"Bah! You are a *coward!*"

For a moment the habitual smile faded from the sport's face, and his features looked very stern and hard-set. No words could have cut more deeply than the four last uttered by the woman.

But finally the old smile crept back over Daisy Dare's handsome face, and with a short laugh, which, however, sounded strangely chilling, he said:

"No man ever called me that without being called upon to prove his words or eat them! But you are a woman, and I suppose I must swallow the insult as gracefully as possible."

"You have disarmed me; do you propose to rob me of my weapons?"

"Not exactly. I have no use for them, for my tools are of the finest quality."

"Then I will take them," and she started to do so.

"A moment, please," interposed the sport, calmly, yet without making a move to stop her. "If I allow you to take those weapons, what guaranty have I that you will not repeat the attempt on my life?"

She paused and faced him.

"You are a man and armed. Are you afraid of a *woman?*"

"It is not fear for myself, dear lady," assured the yellow-haired sport, blandly; "but for you. I hardly want a woman's blood on my hands, and should you attempt to do anything rash, I should feel it my *duty* to prevent you, and thus protect myself. Savvy?"

"You are very considerate," she remarked, cuttingly. "But I think I can take care of myself. I shall not attempt to take your life now, but beware of the future!"

As she stooped to pick up the rifle and revolver, the sport dropped his right hand carelessly into the side-pocket of his coat, while he continued to smoke, holding the cigar with his left hand.

The woman thrust the revolver into the belt around her waist, and, rifle in hand, turned and faced Daisy Dare.

"You are taking unnecessary precautions," she declared. "I know that the hand in your pocket grasps the stock of a self-cocking revolver, but I shall not cause you to use it. This time I have failed; *again* I may not be so unlucky. I give you warning that ere three days have passed the earth will be resting on your coffin!"

She turned and walked slowly away with a stately step, unheeding the soft laugh that the daisy sport sent after her.

"Good-day," called Dare, but she did not pause or turn back until she passed out of sight.

"Well, that is the end of this rather peculiar affair," muttered the man from Denver, as he turned his face toward Roaring Bend. As he sauntered along, he soliloquized:

"She claimed that I was the bitterest enemy of her and hers. She called me a bloodhound. It must be that she knows something about me; but how much? Who can she be? I came here on the trail of Hubert Dawes. Can it be that I have struck a clew? I think I will keep an eye on her, and see what comes out of it. It may be that by so doing I shall be able to run the villain to his lair."

He sauntered on, thinking deeply, till he walked into the camp. Almost the first person he met was the woolly-headed man, who came

hurrying toward him, appearing very excited. As soon as he came near, he wildly flourished his arms and sung out:

"Tr'ubble, pard! Ther Ole Boy's ter pay!"

"What is the matter?" asked Dare, surprised by Wagg's strange actions.

"She's gone!"

"She—who?"

"Ther han'some gal. Ole Reno's lured her off. She's gone away wi' him inter ther hills, Jewhillikins knows where."

"Reno?—whom do you mean? Not the prisoner who escaped last night?"

"The same, I'm a-shoutin'! He kem inter camp in disguise, an' got her ter go off wi' him. I spected it war him as soon as I clapped peepers onto ther galoot, but didn't know fer dead sart-in till I happened ter hear him tell her who he war. They've gone off ter look arter a grave, or suthin' o' the sort. I've been hustlin' round over camp, a-s'archin' fer you ever since they left."

"I fear there is something wrong about this affair," declared Dare, soberly. "If she has been lured away by a villain, it may become our duty to rescue her from his clutches."

"If it do, count me in ner hull bigness!" exclaimed Erastus. "My name is Wagg, an' I'm jist erbout ther dingdest handy man on sech a casion as ye ever did see."

CHAPTER XI.

RENO REAPPEARS.

FROM the window of her room in the White Horse Hotel, Edna Greydon witnessed the moonlight duel between the yellow-haired sport and his five foes. She had been sitting by the window, buried in deep thought, when the crowd came pouring out of the wide door of the Black Dragon Saloon, many of them shouting and swearing. She at once surmised that something unusual was about to take place, and, knowing something of mining-camps in general, the thought flashed over her that it was to be a hanging.

For some unknown reason, she sat there watching the excited throng below. In a few moments she saw that, although it was not a hanging that was to take place, it was an event of no minor importance to the crowd below, at least.

Although she plainly heard the words of the loud-mouthed woolly-headed man, as he excitedly pranced around in the street, she paid little heed to them. But when the five men faced the handsome hatless sport from Denver, the realization that it was to be a duel flashed over her.

The white moonlight revealed the face of the dauntless sport to the watching girl, and she at once saw that he was one of the passengers who had come on the same stage with her from Bolter's Bar. A feeling of admiration sprung into life in her bosom as the man from Denver stepped out and faced his foes; but even then she did not imagine that he was to fight them single-handed and alone.

She did not notice that the person who was to give the signal for the duel to begin was the tall brown-bearded man whom she knew as Warren Kent. In fact she scarcely took her eyes off the yellow-haired sport for an instant. How handsome he looked as he stood there in the white moonlight, with folded arms, calmly awaiting the signal for the terrible duel to begin!

She heard the command to make ready, and then she knew that the one dauntless man was to meet in deadly encounter the five whom he faced. In an instant her heart sprung into her throat, and seemed to stay there. She watched the strange scene as though fascinated by it. She heard the signal-giver counting and would have covered her eyes with her hands, but was helpless to do so. She watched and waited, expecting to see the sport shot down before her eyes.

At the word, she heard the report of pistols, and saw the sport leap aside, unharmed. Then he began advancing rapidly toward his foes, leaping from side to side, so as to disconcert their aim. Her eyes followed his every movement. She saw him suddenly stop, and fling up the hand which held the revolver; then five times a little spout of flame burst from the muzzle of the weapon, and five sharp reports rung out.

A suppressed cry burst from her lips as she saw the five men who confronted the daisy sport go down. Then she knew that, alone and unaided, he had vanquished his foes; but the terrible thought also came to her that his hands were stained with human blood. She did not know that the victor had not shot to kill, but simply to place the enemy *hors de combat*.

Then she covered her eyes with her hands and

for some time remained oblivious to what was occurring in the street below. Suddenly she was startled by hearing a sharp feminine cry that came from thence. Looking down, she saw the strange young woman who rushed forward and dropped beside Toddy Bob. Edna heard the wild words and witnessed the strange scene that followed. It was only when the madman was drawn from the man whom he had hurled to the ground that the moonlight fell upon his face in such a manner that it was plainly seen by her. Then she uttered the wild cry that so startled the crowd below, and caused them to look up at her.

Even as the madman dashed wildly down the street, she sunk to the floor by the window, her overstrained nerves giving away, and her senses leaving her.

She knew not how long she remained unconscious, but finally she realized that she was lying on the floor, with the cool mountain breeze that came softly through the window falling lightly on her face. She could not, for a time, remember where she was or what had happened, but finally it all came back to her with a sudden rush that again made her senses reel.

"It was *his* face!" she moaned—"his face—my father's, and he is dead! What can it mean? He has gone!"

With sudden strength, she sprung to her feet and gazed down into the street—now silent and deserted, save for an occasional passer. The crowd, the duelists, the strange, wild-appearing man—all were gone. She pressed her hands to her head and sunk into a chair, with a low moan.

"What has happened? I cannot think—I cannot remember! A crowd, a duel, and a face that looked strangely like my father's. But it could not have been him, for he is dead. Yet it was not a dream."

For a long time she sat by the window in the moonlight, pressing her hands to her head and slowly recalling the exciting events that she had recently witnessed. She did not hear the wailing cries of an old fiddle that was being tortured by an amateur musician within the saloon across the street. She did not even hear the occasional burst of hoarse laughter that sounded above the violin's screech. She was oblivious to her surroundings.

Finally she aroused herself, and started to her feet, throwing out her hands, as though to banish the thoughts that came crowding upon her.

"What folly!" she cried. "My father is dead, and that face was a stranger's. The resemblance, if any, was imagined or accidental. This very night a friend of my father described his death to me. He even buried him with his own hands. Yet I have allowed the wild thought to creep into my head that this strange-appearing man might be he. How foolish! In the morning I will again see Warren Kent, and learn more of my father's death and where he is buried."

But she could not entirely dismiss the maniac's face from her thoughts, and for a part of the night it haunted her dreams. Toward morning, however, the troublesome dreams faded away, and a sweet, refreshing slumber came to her.

In the morning she met the dauntless, yellow-haired sport, whom she had seen vanquish five foes in the duel the night before. The particulars of the meeting the reader already knows.

Edna found the landlord's wife busy in the kitchen. The worthy little woman greeted her guest cheerfully, and in a few moments they were conversing pleasantly.

It did not take Edna long to learn all that Mrs. Clark knew of the madman. The creature had been seen by the first to strike pay-dirt in the vicinity of Roaring Bend, and he had several times appeared to the citizens since the camp had been founded. No one professed to know his story.

Not much information of import did Edna obtain from Mrs. Clark, and if the little woman spoke truly, she was not liable to obtain much information concerning the madman from any source.

As Edna was about to ascend to her room, she met, at the foot of the stairs, a decidedly rough-looking man, whose face was almost entirely concealed by a huge beard and the drooping brim of the hat he wore.

This person glanced quickly around, as though to see if any one was near, made a quick sign, and said in a suppressed voice:

"Sh! Don't be alarmed, Miss Greydon. I am Warren Kent."

Although the announcement was a rather startling one, she did not appear alarmed. She simply looked at him inquiringly, without uttering a word.

"You are surprised to see me thus disguised," he said, in a low tone, again glancing swiftly around, but failing to see Erastus Wagg, who was just beyond a partly-open door, "straining" his ears to hear. "I cannot fully explain now, but will at another time. I got into trouble here last night, and it is absolutely necessary that I am not again recognized by any of the citizens of this camp."

"I know—I have heard," Edna interpolated. "There is a serious charge against you. They say that you are an outlaw."

"It's a lie!" cried the man, in a suppressed voice, yet speaking louder than he intended. "I can easily prove to a candid mind that the charge is false. But I know quite well what my fate would be should I fall into the hands of an ignorant mob. Judge Lynch would settle the case, and I would be hanged, before I could have a show to prove my innocence. I am no outlaw—I swear by your father's grave!"

There was an earnest ring to the man's words that made them sound sincere, and, looking straight into his eyes, which for a moment met hers, all her doubts vanished. She extended her hand, saying:

"I believe you."

For a moment their hands were clasped, and as soon as her hand touched his, a feeling of repulsion again swept over her; but, by an unseen effort, she banished it.

"You spoke of my father's grave," she said, softly. "Can you take me there? Is it far away?"

"I can easily guide you to it," was the reply: "and it is not far away. If you wish to go, I would be pleased to escort you."

There was a concealed eagerness in his voice that she failed to detect.

"Is it not dangerous?"

"I hardly think that we will meet any danger from which I cannot protect you. If you wish to go, I will secure a horse for you and we will start at once. I must not delay long in this camp, for fear of being detected."

For a few moments she thought deeply, and finally she said:

"I think I will go. If I do not go with you now, I may lose the chance of finding my poor father's grave at all, for it is not probable that you will remain in this dangerous locality long. I will be ready in a few minutes."

"Stay," laying a hand on her arm, as she was about to ascend the stairs. "If we were seen together, some inquisitive person might examine me too closely. I have a plan. Meet me at the north side of the camp. I will be there with the horses."

"Very well."

Then they parted; but thirty minutes later, mounted on two fine horses, they rode away into the hills, leaving Roaring Bend behind them, and also leaving the woolly-headed man, excitedly rushing around, searching for the daisy sport.

As they rode on, Reno told the girl of his past life in the camp.

"I was in these parts, searching for the lost gold cave, when pay-dirt was struck where Roaring Bend now stands," he began. "This was after your poor father had died in my arms, and after I had come into possession of the incomplete map that he gave me. I know that the cave must be somewhere near Roaring Bend, so when not on the search I stopped at the White Horse in camp. Of course I did not want any one to know that I was searching for the lost treasure, for if it had been known, my footsteps might have been dogged. Therefore, I was decidedly sly about leaving camp. I never left in the daytime for fear of being followed. I think now that my actions must have appeared very strange to the men of the camp. I took no interest in mining affairs or in other things that interested the people of Roaring Bend. Finally, I saw that they were regarding me suspiciously, and I resolved to do something to exonerate myself in their eyes."

"It was about that time when an unusual stir was created by Scarlet Mask, the outlaw. An indignation meeting was called, and I saw my chance to make myself solid in the camp. I took a leading part in the meeting, and headed the reward offered for the outlaw who is pleased to style himself the Colorado Claude Duval. This little piece of business proved to be a grand success, and I felt that I had succeeded in clearing away every suspicion against me."

"Then something happened that I do not understand. A dying man, who claimed to be one of Scarlet Mask's outlaws, accused me of being his murderer and the chief, Scarlet Mask, himself. The hearers believed him, of course,

and like a flash I comprehended what a situation I was in. I realized that if taken prisoner by the crowd, with the dying outlaw's accusation against me ringing in their ears, they would not pause for a trial or investigation, but I would be summarily lynched. I tried to stand them off; but it was useless. They rushed upon me, and firing hastily, blindly, in self-defense, I shot one of them down. Then I was seized and disarmed, and I felt that my fate was sealed.

"With a noose around my neck, I was dragged to the gallows-tree. They were about to string me up, when Scarlet Mask, himself, appeared, followed by his men. The outlaws charged the crowd, which scattered and fled. Improving the opportunity, I escaped, but with my hands still bound and the noose around my neck, with the long end dragging behind me. No one can imagine the struggle that I made to release my hands; but finally I succeeded, and throwing off the dreadful noose, I started for Bolter's Bar. I finally reached there, much more dead than alive; but a short rest of a few days put me on my feet again. Then I resolved to come back to Roaring Bend again. Everything I had in the world was there at the White Horse Hotel. Procuring a disguise, as Warren Kent, I came back to the camp by stage, and thus met you. Last night I again got into trouble, but escaped."

"You must have been assisted," remarked Edna.

"I was. I did not know that I had a friend in this part of the country, but, fortunately for me, I have. Friends assisted me to escape last night, and furnished me with this disguise."

"That was fortunate."

"For me—yes. Had I not escaped they would have hanged me. The charge that I was Scarlet Mask could have been easily proved false, but without doubt they would have hanged me for shooting one of the mob upon the night of accusation. It was purely an act of self-defense, but Charley Dorr had friends, and they would have considered nothing but the undisputable fact that he met death at my hands."

Having made this explanation, Reno gradually turned their conversation from his own affairs to other matters. Gradually they drifted into conversation concerning the unfortunate Lewis Greydon, and while the man talked, Edna rode along by his side attentively listening and occasionally asking a question. She noted not the flight of time and took little heed of the winding ways along which they passed, until finally with a start of surprise she noted that the sun indicated that the hour of noon was near at hand. A glance at her watch showed her that it was eleven o'clock.

"Why, Mr. Reno," she exclaimed, a faint suspicion of foul play flashing through her mind, "how much further must we go? You said that it was not far. We have come a long way."

"We are almost there," he replied. "It is only a short distance now."

They were ascending a mountain-trail; in fact, they had been climbing upward for some time before Edna noticed it. They now rode on in silence.

Suddenly Edna drew rein, and turning to her companion, firmly said:

"Mr. Reno, there is something wrong about this. Have you been deceiving me?"

CHAPTER XII.

IN A VILLAIN'S POWER.

MARTIN RENO seemed surprised.

"Deceiving you?" he echoed. "What do you mean? What is wrong?"

"You said that it was not far from the mining-camp to my father's grave. We have come a long way."

"What one person might consider a long distance another might think short," was the reply. "I assure you, Miss Greydon, we have not come far. You remember our horses have walked."

"We must have come far. It is near noon, and we started early."

Reno glanced at his watch, and uttered an exclamation of apparent surprise.

"It is later than I thought," he admitted. "But we have traveled very slowly. We can easily complete the remainder of the journey in half an hour."

"But why are we ascending this mountain?" asked Edna, still remaining suspicious. "Surely this trail cannot lead to my father's grave. I think you said that his grave was in a valley or pocket."

"So it is. We ascend a little higher, then pass along the mountain side until we come to a place where we can descend into the little

pocket where the grave is. This is the best route."

For a few moments she studied his face closely, seeking to discover the truth there, if possible. It was a face with strangely contradictory features. At a glance one might think it an unusually frank and open countenance. At a second look, perhaps it would appear deceptive and secretive.

"I have trusted you thus far," said the girl, finally, "and I suppose I must continue to do so. It cannot be that you are base enough to betray the trust of a poor friendless girl who is in your power."

"Thanks," with a bow. "Your confidence is refreshing, Miss Greydon. Let us go on."

Once more they moved onward up the mountain trail. Reno dropped back by Edna's side.

"Miss Greydon," he said, after a short silence, "you have trusted me in this affair, and for a short time, at least, I am your protector. I am proud of the position. It would be a delightful one to hold through life— Hold! Hear me out," and he placed a hand on her horse's bridle.

"I may seem a trifle hasty in this, but when you consider all sides of the affair, I think you will pardon that. Remember, I was your father's friend—I was with him during his last moments. When I first met you I fell in love with you; I love you still. Will you be mine?"

The girl stopped her horse by a quick, hard pull. Every vestige of color had left her face, and her dark eyes were fastened upon the man with a look of fear in their depths. She essayed to speak, but for a moment her voice failed her. Finally she uttered:

"I hardly think this a fit occasion for such a proposal. Remember, we are on our way to my father's grave. If you have anything of this nature to say to me, please select some other time to do so."

Her voice sounded hoarse and unnatural, and her lips trembled as she spoke.

Martin Reno was not to be silenced, however.

"I remember everything, my dear Miss Greydon. I have been trying to bridle my tongue, but have found the effort a failure. I could not help loving you, however hard I might try. Neither could I prevent my telling you of that love. The rash deed is done, and I want an answer. Do not try to put me off, for I must know my fate."

"Mr. Reno, can it be that you have no respect for my wishes?" and for a moment a touch of color came to her cheeks. "I think I requested you to speak of such matters at another time."

He flung out one hand, and uttered an exclamation of impatience.

"It is useless!" he cried. "I have spoken, and I must have an answer. I was your father's friend, and I have the map that will reveal the lost cave, where the gold is hidden for which your father was searching. He gave the map to me. When the gold is found, I shall be a wealthy man. If you marry me, you shall want for nothing. It is better to give me an answer now than to force me to repeat my words at another time."

The girl bowed her head in hesitation. Had the man asked her to be his wife at another time, she would not have hesitated about answering. But now she dared not answer. She feared that she had been lured away from the camp by Reno for some evil purpose. She knew that she was in his power, and she was afraid to answer his question, as she would have done under other circumstances.

She looked up appealingly, resolved to try a little strategy.

"Mr. Reno, give me time. Do not press me for an answer now. It is so sudden. Indeed, I must have time."

But her heart sunk, for even as she uttered the words, she realized that they were wasted. He shook his head, firmly.

"I see you have forgotten that I am placed in such a situation that I cannot visit Roaring Bend with impunity. If there was no charge against me in the camp, I might go there to receive your answer. But each time I go there now, I do so fearing that my disguise will be penetrated, and I shall meet a violent death at the hands of a mob. No, no! I must have an answer now."

"Well," and her voice was now firm, "if you must have it now, you shall. I am sorry, Mr. Reno, but I must decline to become your wife. However, you were my father's friend, and I hope you will still continue a friend to me."

For a moment the man was silent, then a bitter laugh broke from his lips.

"It is as I thought," he cried. "I was a fool

to hope that you would willingly accept me for a companion through life. But I assure you, a worse fate might befall a woman. Let's go on."

"Stop! I am going no further. I shall return at once to the camp."

Again the man laughed, and this time it sounded harsh and brutal.

"Oh, ho! So you will return at once, *will* you? I think you will find it much more difficult to do so than you imagine."

"What do you mean?"

Edna asked the question, although she knew only too well what he meant. She at last was sure that she was in the power of an unprincipled villain, and she trembled with fear as she thought of the future.

"Mean?" he echoed. "I mean that, now that we have started on this journey, we will complete it. There shall be no turning back now."

"I shall go back if I wish," she retorted, firmly. "You may go on, Mr. Reno, but I shall return to Roaring Bend."

"Indeed! Do you imagine that you can find your way back, unaided?"

"If you will not return with me, I shall try it," was the steady reply.

"And would become food for coyotes and buzzards," said the man, coarsely. "Bah! There is but one thing you can do. Follow me."

"Not another step."

He fixed his eyes upon her with an evil glare.

If you will not come willingly I shall be forced to compel you. You are in my power, and the most sensible thing you can do is to submit quietly. If you are obstinate it will but make it worse for you."

"Oh, Mr. Reno, it cannot be that you are so bad!" she cried brokenly. "You are but making sport. Let us go back."

Another coarse laugh broke from his lips.

"You will find it a mighty solid joke, I fancy. At present I mean business. You will go on with me."

She did not reply, but attempted to swiftly rein her horse and ride down the trail. An exclamation burst from the villain's lips as he grasped the bridle-rein of her horse firmly.

"Not so fast, sweet one! I do not propose to have you go dashing downward and break your neck."

"Release my horse!" she commanded, her eyes flashing. "Do not dare to attempt to detain me."

"Well, that is good, I swear!" he exclaimed. "Do not dare." Why, you make me laugh."

With an exclamation of anger, she struck at the hand that held the bridle-rein. The man laughed mockingly.

"Now you are mad, ain't you? You begin to show your spirit, but you had better submit. I shall be forced to compel you to go with me."

He flung an arm about her waist and dragged her from the saddle. She struggled bravely, but he handled her as easily as though she were a child. Springing to the ground, he held her, while he quickly produced a handkerchief and tied her hands behind her. When she saw that to struggle was useless she submitted, breathing a prayer for help.

When he had bound her hands Reno succeeded in mounting his horse and lifting her up before him.

"Now we will go on, sweet one," he said, mockingly. "It is a shame to force you to bear such rudeness, but you brought it upon yourself."

She did not reply, but in the depths of her dark eyes there was a burning light which told that she was not yet conquered.

He started on up the trail, calling to the other horse, which obediently followed. Higher and higher they mounted, the trail becoming more difficult as they advanced. To the girl it seemed hours, but she held her lips firmly closed, making no inquiry, nor uttering a word.

Suddenly, from behind a large boulder, arose a fierce-looking man, who held a light rifle in his hand, and who cried:

"Halt! Who are you?"

Edna instantly cried out to the man for help, but her captor laughed shortly, and repeated a few quickly-spoken words.

"Correct. Pass on," ordered the man with the rifle, as he again sunk down behind the boulder.

They again advanced, for a short distance the trail wound through a mass of stunted pines, then it suddenly debouched upon a level plateau, which was bounded upon three sides by perpendicular walls.

To Edna's surprise, she saw that half a dozen rude cabins were built upon the plateau. In

front of some of these were seated several rough-looking men, who were engaged in smoking and playing cards. At once the truth flashed through Edna's mind. She was in an outlaws' retreat.

Five minutes later she found herself confined in one of the cabins. She flung herself upon the floor, moaning and sobbing:

"Heavenly Father, aid me! I have fallen into the hands of ruffians and outlaws, and this man, who professes to have been my father's friend, and whom I trusted, is their leader."

CHAPTER XIII.

TO THE RESCUE.

"THE blamed critter's burnin' durned stout-smellin' terbacker, pard," observed the woolly-headed man in a whisper, as a whiff of vile-smelling tobacco-smoke, borne by the faint night-breeze, came to his nostrils.

"Right you are, 'Rastus,'" replied Daisy Dare, also speaking in a low whisper. "It's a wonder the stuff don't poison him to death."

"P'isen nuthin'! Terbacker never will throw him. I'm a-bettin' that ther galoot drinks whisky that w'u'd knock er common man stiff at er hundred paces. I sw'ar, I believe I kin smell his breath frum hyar!"

"Careful, 'Rastus,'" warned the sport. "Sing low, or the fellow will hear you."

They were crouching in the darkness far up the side of the mountain, upon which were built the cabins of the outlaws. From their position they could see some distance away a bright spark of light, which they rightly conjectured was fire in the glowing bowl of a well-filled pipe.

Finding, as the hours wore away, that Edna Greydon did not return to camp, the sport had become convinced that something was wrong, and with the woolly-headed man, had started out to find the girl, if possible.

Wagg proved to be as keen as an Indian at trailing, but at times the nature of the ground over which Reno and the girl had passed bothered him. Being thus delayed, it became late in the day before they came to the faint trail that led along the valley-bottom and approached the mountain upon which was the outlaws' retreat.

At dusk they stood beside their horses at the foot of the mountain, and the woolly-headed man observed:

"This hyar trail leads up'ards, Daisy, an' I'm a-shoutin' that we've struck a rich lead. Ef we climb, I reckon that we'll find a pesky outlaws' nest at ther top-eend o' this elevation, or therabouts. Ef we do, it will settle one p'int in my mind, an' that will be about Ole Reno. Ef it are as I'm beginnin' ter think, he's an outlaw, an' blamed ef I know but that he's Scarlet Mask hisself."

When the darkness came down they ascended the mountain, leading their horses with one hand, while each held a revolver clutched in the other. At times the trail became so rough that this mode of ascent was both difficult and dangerous, but they pressed resolutely upward.

Finally, for various reasons, they decided to leave their horses where they thought they could easily find them, and continue without them. This they did, and some time later we find them crouching in the darkness, watching the glowing spark in the distance, and conversing in whispers.

"This settles it in my mind, Daisy," declared the woolly-headed man. "Thet feller over thar is er guard, an' we shall find er measly roost o' piratical outlaws furder up."

"I think you are murmuring the Gospel truth, 'Rastus," admitted the yellow-haired sport. "Things appear that way at present, and if that is so Miss Greydon is a prisoner in their hands."

"An' that pesky Reno tuck her thar, durn his homely mug!" ejaculated Wagg, nearly speaking aloud in his anger.

"Easy again, my friend," warned Dare, peering through the darkness toward the glowing spark, to see if the outlaw had heard his companion's careless words. "You'll be giving us away, if you don't have a care."

"Reckon ye'r right, pard," allowed the woolly-headed man, also gazing toward the glowing spark, and making sure that the guard had heard nothing. "But yer see it makes me blamed mad that I want ter let off steam somehow. I'll 'low that I've been fooled erbout that gerloot. I tuck him ter be square, or, at least, ter hev nuthin' ter do wi' these hyer blamed outlaws; but I guess I war 'way off."

"If not their chief he must be one of their number; that is now settled in my mind."

"He's their chief, blame his eyes! I war lookin' fer sumbuddy else ter be Scarlet Mask, but it's no use ter look furder. Er dyin' outlaw—one o' his men—swore that he was ther chief, an' he didn't lie. Ther varmint that I war lookin' fer has gi'n me ther slip ergin, but I'll run him ter his hole ef it takes er lifetime, an' then—"

Wagg broke off of his own accord, and his teeth came together with a savage click. Although Daisy Dare could not see his companion's face, he plainly heard the woolly-headed man's vindictive words, uttered in a hoarse whisper, and he knew that there was a cause for them.

"Have you an enemy, pard, whom you are trailing down?" asked the man from Denver.

"Yes," replied Wagg, instantly. "I am huntin' down ther human devil whose hands is stained with ther blood o' ther best friend I ever knew. In Deadwood Gulch, up ermining ther Black Hills, is ther grave o' Tender Joe, er man who hed er heart as big 's er bucket. He was fresh frum the East, but he stood by an ole cuss like me, an' nussed me through w'en ther reds hed shot me full o' holes. Then we bekum pards. We struck er good streak an' tuck out er pile o' yaller. Then Poker Paul, ther wu'st gambler an' cheat in ther camp, struck Tender Joe, cleaned him out o' his gold, an' shot him through ther heart when Joe 'cused him o' cheatin'. I planted my pard, Tender Joe, an' frum then till now I've follered on ther trail o' Poker Paul. He's gi'n me ther slip more as onc't, but I'll yet bring him ter an account."

"Poker Paul—Poker Paul! Wagg, we are trailing the same man. I am after Hubert Dawes, one of whose assumed names was Poker Paul. Your game is my game."

"I hev ther fu'st claim," declared the woolly-headed man, excitedly. "He's mine! Don't yer try ter take him frum me."

"Easy again, 'Rastus," and the sport grasped his companion's arm with a grip of steel. "Don't make a mutton-headed fool of yourself! You seem determined to let that fellow know that we are here."

"He's my game!" persisted Wagg.

"This is no time to discuss that. Remember, the girl is in this outlaw's power. She must be rescued."

"Right, Daisy," admitted Erastus, once more appearing like himself. "We will resky her, or throw up ther sponge. This other 'fair kin be settled at some other time."

"Hark!" admonished the sport.

Listening, they heard a horse coming down the difficult trail from above. Soon they heard the guard utter a challenge, and another person, evidently the rider of the horse, reply, then pass on down the mountain.

"Thet war Reno, er I'm er buzzard," declared Wagg.

"I thought so," replied the man from Denver.

"He's goin' back ter Roarin' Bend fer su'th-in'."

"It appears that way. We must remain where we are till he is out of earshot, at least."

They lay still, listening to the receding sounds of the horse and rider descending the mountain. Gradually these sounds grew fainter and fainter, and finally they died out in the distance. But still the two men made no move.

Finally, Daisy Dare said:

"Now for it, 'Rastus. First, that fellow over there must be disposed of. How shall we do it?"

"Take him by s'prise an' knock him stiff," advised Wagg. "Then we can truss 'im up fer keeps."

"That is the way it must be done. We must creep upon him. Come on!"

"I'm with you, pard, an' my name is Wagg."

They began creeping noiselessly toward the unsuspecting guard. Scarce a sound did either of them make as they advanced slowly through the darkness. It was slow and tedious work, but had either attempted to hurry it would have proved fatal to their plans.

Nearer and nearer they crept toward the place where they thought the guard was stationed, for they could not now see the glowing spark of fire.

Suddenly, scarcely more than a rod away, they heard a muttered oath, then a match was struck and flashed up in the darkness, and at the same instant Erastus Wagg's foot struck against some small stones that rattled slightly. The burning match was suddenly extinguished, and utter silence reigned.

Both Wagg and the sport knew that the outlaw had heard the unfortunate noise, and was listening intently, therefore they remained per-

fectedly still. Finally, they heard a repetition of the oath, and again a match was lighted.

Dare now saw the outlaw, who was on his knees just beyond a large boulder, bending forward with his pipe in his mouth and shielding the burning match with his hands. Evidently the guard had allowed his pipe to go out, and was about to relight it.

As the man lifted the match to his pipe-bowl the light shone full upon his face. Daisy Dare could scarcely repress an exclamation of surprise. The face was that of the stage-driver, Long John!

The sport was astonished, but he did not pause to ask why the driver was there. Up into the air he leaped, sailing lightly over the boulder, and alighting fairly upon the crouching man's shoulders. Dashed forward on his face, the guard was fairly knocked breathless, and before he could recover he felt an iron grip on his throat.

In the darkness the daisy sport sat astride the driver, and while grasping the man's throat to prevent an outcry, listened intently. Upon the opposite side of the boulder, grasping a drawn revolver, the woolly-headed man also listened.

"All right, Daisy," finally assured Wagg. "I don't hear er blissid sound."

"There is no one near, I think," was the low reply. "Come over and bind this chap, while I hold him."

Wagg hastened to comply, and while Dare held the half-stunned guard, the woolly-headed man tore up the outlaw's clothes and gagged and bound him with the strips.

"You may shoot me if this is not the fellow who drives the mountain stage," declared the man from Denver. "He it was who accused me of being one of Scarlet Mask's followers, and he was one of the five who attempted to do me up in the duel. He has a bandage on his head now to cover the place where my bullet plowed a furrow along his skull."

"Is that so?" exclaimed Erastus in astonishment.

"Yes; and I begin to understand several things that have puzzled me not a little. As he is one of Scarlet Mask's men, it is easy to understand why the road-agents always knew when to drop down upon the stage. But it puzzles me to understand why his little game has not been dropped to long ago."

"He's a sharp 'un. Pritty nigh half ther time Reddy Barnes has driv ther hearse fer him. I reckon he's bin with ther outlaws ther most on ther time w'en off duty."

"Evidently. But have you made him fast, 'Rastus?"

"I reckon," was the laconic reply.

Dare struck a match and examined the guard's bonds. It took but a moment to show him that Wagg had done his work faithfully. Extincting the match, he arose to his feet, saying:

"Now for it, 'Rastus. It is probable that we will find the outlaws' nest a little further up, but there may be other guards. We must be very careful."

With drawn revolvers clasped in their right hands they made their way upward through the growth of scraggy pines. They advanced cautiously, and it was some time before they reached the plateau. It was a surprise to them when they did so, and saw before them several cabins looming up in the darkness.

"By my granser's ghost!" gasped Erastus Wagg, in a whisper, "hyer's er reg'ler city of 'em!"

"And admirably hidden from prying eyes it is," supplemented the sport. "If I am not mistaken this is a sort of recess or alcove near the mountain-top, inclosed on three sides by steep walls, and shut in on the fourth by these pines. It is a good hiding-place for a gang of robbers."

"But durn it, pard! how are we goin' ter find ther gal?"

"That may prove difficult."

"I don't s'pose ye intend ter go round an' knock at ther doors an' ax ef she are ther, do ye?"

"Well, hardly. We shall have to devise some feasible plan for action."

The sport was silent for several minutes, then he said:

"I think the only thing we can do is to go to each cabin and listen. By accident we may succeed in finding which cabin the girl is confined in by so doing. You take that side and I will this."

"Karect."

They separated and advanced as noiselessly as shadows toward the cabins of the outlaws. Soon Dare was crouching with his ear pressed to the wall of one of the rude structures. With bated breath, he listened.

In a short time Dare heard a footstep within. Then some one took hold of the door and evidently attempted to open it, but failed. Still listening, he heard something that sounded like a sob.

A wild hope sprung into the sport's breast. It might be that fortune had directed him to the very cabin wherein the girl was confined. He arose to his feet and examined the door as well as he could in the darkness.

In a moment the man from Denver found that the door was fastened on the outside, and therefore whoever was within was a prisoner. Again the sport listened.

Soon he heard a low voice speaking. It was a woman, and she was evidently talking to herself, for she spoke so low that for a time Dare could understand none of her words. Finally, she sobbingly exclaimed:

"Father in Heaven! is there no way of escaping from the clutches of this monster?"

The sport's heart leaped with joy. The voice was Edna Greydon's. He rapped lightly on the door.

For a few moments there was no reply, and all was silent within, but, upon his repeating the rap, a faltering voice asked:

"Who is there?"

"A friend," replied Daisy Dare, speaking in a low tone. "One who has come to save you."

A low cry of joy was his answer, and he began to hastily undo the heavy fastenings of the door.

Even as the door swung open, the air was rent by a sharp yell near at hand, followed by the spiteful report of a revolver!

CHAPTER XIV.

A RACE FOR LIFE.

DAISY DARE instantly comprehended the situation.

The woolly-headed man had been discovered by some of the outlaws, and was in trouble.

The captive girl emerged from the cabin as soon as the door swung open, and, grasping her hand, the sport said, quickly and firmly:

"The camp has been alarmed, and we must run for our lives. There is no time to lose. Come on."

Then, just as they started, Erastus Wagg came dashing toward them, panting and puffing from his exertions. He was hatless, and in his right hand he held a revolver.

"Geelong ter John Shinglewhacker!" he exclaimed as he came up. "Ye've got ther gal, pard, but I've raised ther very ole dickens o' er row. Ther hull blamed measly nest will be stirrin' i' jist four-ner half statoo seekins."

"We must run! Take the lady's other hand," ordered Dar.

Casting an apprehensive glance over his shoulder, the woolly-headed man grasped one of Edna's hands, and the three fugitives ran swiftly across the plateau, and plunged in among the pines, as they came to the trail leading downward.

Hoarse cries were uttered behind them, and even as they disappeared among the pines, one or two shots rang out, and the whistling lead flew past them. The outlaw camp was fully aroused.

"Reckon one blamed fool's gone ter ther happy hulin'-groun's," declared Erastus, as they hurried on. "Run plumb ag'in' him in ther dark. He fetched er yoop, but I corked 'im up wi' er stopper o' cold lead."

Daisy Dare said nothing, but clinging to the girl's hand, hurried her on. He realized that they would be fortunate if they succeeded in eluding the outlaws. Their horses were some distance down the mountain, and they might not readily succeed in finding them.

As for Edna, nerved by terror, she ran on, trusting everything to the one who had released her from captivity, recognizing him as the handsome yellow-haired man whom she had so much admired.

Cursing and yelling, the outlaws came rushing along in pursuit. Down through the growth of scraggy pines dashed the pursuers and pursued, each straining every muscle.

"We can't do it terz-ther. Daisy," puffed the woolly-headed man. "One on us must ma'e er stand an' hold up ther bloody varlets, while ther other 'scapes wi' ther gal."

"Right you are, 'Rastus," admitted Dare.

"You go on wi' ther gal; I'll stop an' chat wi' ther boyees. Ef I don't see ye ergin, remember that Erastus Wagg war er white man. So long."

Then the woolly-headed man dropped behind Daisy Dare and the girl, allowing them to go on, while he jogged slowly along, peering keenly to the right and left, in search for cover where he could stand off the pursuers for a few moments, at least.

The outlaws broke from the pines, and catching a glimpse of Wagg's dark form, sent several bullets singing by his ears. The next moment the dark form disappeared, and as the outlaws came on, Erastus opened fire from behind a huge boulder.

The woolly-headed man worked his revolvers in a decidedly skillful manner, and despite the darkness, he did not waste more than one shot out of three.

Down went two or three of the pursuers, and brought to a sudden halt, the remainder sought cover.

A laugh of defiance broke from Wagg's lips, as he cried:

"Hunt yer holes, you pesky varlets! Ef one on ye dares ter show his nose, I'll shoot et orf!"

Then, without waiting a moment, Wagg began to back away down the mountain, keeping the large boulder between the outlaws and himself. He had not gone far when he heard the outlaws calling to him from their place of refuge. They thought him still behind the boulder, but, knowing that they would soon discover their error, Era tus hastened to put as great a distance as possible between himself and them.

But a few moments passed before a fierce yell of rage and anger coming from above, told him that the trick had been discovered.

Ut ering a shrill whoop of defiance, Wagg sprung to his feet and bounded away down the mountain.

Now that he had succeeded in stopping the pursuing outlaws long enough for Dare and the girl to get a start, he cared not to keep under cover himself. Instead, when he sprung to his feet, he uttered a ringing yell in order to attract the attention of the pursuers; then he dashed down the mountain, taking care not to follow the sport and Edna. His object was to draw the outlaws away on a false scent.

Onward and downward he leaped and ran, yelling at almost every bound. Down, down through the darkness, stumbling, staggering, nearly falling, yet bounding onward with desperate energy. At times his feet would strike a loose stone, or some other object, and nearly throw him headlong, but he did not pause to choose his way more carefully. Each moment he was in danger of breaking his neck, yet by some miraculous means he escaped injury.

Behind him came the pursuers, answering the fugitive's yells with defiant cries, and ever and anon firing a shot, with the wild hope that the flying lead might bring down the desperate fugitive.

It was a terrible race for life.

"Guess it's good-by, John, this time," thought the woolly-headed man, as he bounded onward. "Reckon ther fu'st thing I know I'll be takin' er five hundred foot jump through the air."

But he did nothing of the kind, for the next moment he tripped and plunged headlong to the ground. The shock quite stunned him for a moment, and as he lay still, he heard the triumphant yell that pealed from the lips of the foremost outlaw who witnessed his downfall.

The next moment the yell was answered in a similar manner, and, within a few feet of the unfortunate man, a dark form sprang up, and with a wild laugh, dashed away down the mountain-side.

Erastus made no attempt to arise, but lay quite still, listening to the chorus of wild cries, and the sharp reports of discharged revolvers. Soon a form bounded by the prostrate man, and dashed downward through the darkness. Hugging the ground as closely as possible, Wagg waited for the others, hoping that they would pass without discovering him.

One by one they went bounding by, and still the daring woolly-headed man remained undiscovered. One of the pursuers actually leaped directly over the prostrate form of the fallen man, and yet did not observe him.

Finally, when all had passed, Wagg sat up, rubbing his bruises, grinning broadly, and winking uselessly in the darkness.

"Reckon ole Wagg ain't no Canary bird," he observed, sagely. "W'en they get ahead on the ole man they've got ter rise mighty gol-durned early."

With this self-complimentary remark he arose to his feet.

"Wonder who that feller war?" he muttered, after listening to the cries and shots that could now be heard below. "Must hev been that crazy chap as hangs around Roarin' Bend. Anyhow he popped up at just ther right time an' led them gerloots off him w'en I thought they hed me dead ter rights."

Carefully getting his bearings, he started toward the place where he thought the horses had been left.

"It's mor'n likely ther sport has tuk 'em both—one fur hisself an' one fur ther gal," said Erastus; "but I'll find out ef it's so."

Within thirty minutes he found the place where the horses had been left, and to his joy, he found that one of them was still there. The sport had taken but one of the animals.

"He's white, is Daisy," declared Erastus, as he unhitched the horse and sprung upon its back. "An' now ter ketch up."

CHAPTER XV.

TRIED AND CONDEMNED.

THROUGH the darkness toward Roaring Bend galloped a horse, bearing a double burden, the dauntless sport from Denver and the beautiful girl whom he had rescued from the clutches of the outlaws.

As they made their way through the night, Edna told her gallant companion of the deceit and perfidy of Martin Reno. In Edna's mind, there existed no doubt but that Reno was in truth the chief of the outlaws, Scarlet Mask, the Colorado Claude Duval.

Edna also told him that Reno had visited her but a short time before she was rescued, and had informed her that he was going to Roaring Bend. Dare knew that the villain had descended the mountain while he and Wagg were crouching in the darkness, not far down the trail.

Dare was still doubtful upon one point. Although it now appeared that Reno was the outlaw chief, he was not yet ready to accept it for a fact. He remembered that a person attired as Scarlet Mask was said to dress had appeared upon a projecting ledge as the stage was passing through Skeleton Canyon, and at the same time Martin Reno, disguised as Warren Kent, was a passenger within the coach.

He also remembered the story of how the citizens of Roaring Bend came near hanging Reno, and the scarlet-faced outlaw appeared even while the condemned man was standing beneath the gallows-tree, with a noose around his neck.

It was true, that one of Reno's men might have personated the chief on both occasions, for the purpose of removing suspicion from the right party, but he doubted that this was so. However, there was one point he considered certain, Reno if not the outlaw chief was one of the band. With this in his mind, he urged the doubly-burdened horse as fast as he dared, hoping to reach the Bend in time to intercept Reno ere he left the camp.

As they dashed onward the hoof strokes of the horse they rode drowned the sound of pursuit that otherwise they would have heard. Some distance in the rear came a horseman, who was rapidly decreasing the distance between them.

Finally the horseman approached so near that the sounds of pursuit came to the sport's ears and caused him to glance apprehensively around. In the darkness he could see nothing, but he was fully aware that some one was coming.

A moment later a sharp cry came to the sport's ears, telling him that the pursuer was his companion, Wagg, the woolly-headed man.

It was past midnight when the two men and the rescued girl rode down the main street of Roaring Bend Camp, and drew up in front of the White Horse Hotel. A faint light was burning within, and in a few moments Joel Clark was aroused. A few words explained the situation to the amazed landlord, and the answer to a single question told them that no person answering to the description of Martin Reno as then disguised was within the hotel.

Three minutes later Daisy Dare and the woolly-headed man were silently crossing the street toward the Black Dragon Saloon, wherein also burned a dim light.

The door yielded to Dare's touch, and the two men stepped quietly into the room.

A dark form was odding sleepily behind the bar, and at the further end of the long apartment of now deserted tables two men were sitting. There was liquor on a table by their side, and one of them held a half emptied glass in an unsteady hand. They were the old toper, Toddy Bob, and a person, whom, at a glance, Dare recognized as Martin Reno in the disguise which Edna Greydon had described to him.

The daisy sport and his companion advanced toward the two men, who glanced up inquiringly at them, but manifested no surprise. Suddenly they found themselves looking into the muzzles of a pair of revolvers held in the hands of the man from Denver.

"Gentlemen, you will please me by elevating your empty hands," said the daisy sport, blandly smiling. "It will be to the promotion of your physical health if you move with rapidity and attempt no funny business."

"Thet's erbout ther way I figger it," declared Erastus Wagg, as he slowly produced a pair of long-barrel'd, rusty revolvers. "Ye'd better putt 'em up, mer wall-eyed sunflowers."

Reno uttered a furious oath.

"What does this mean?" he snarled.

"Are you going to lift your hands?" inquired Dare, as he calmly cocked his revolvers.

With another explosive oath, Reno raised his hands above his head. Toddy Bob stared at the two men with a look of drunken wonder. However, the sport paid little attention to the old toper.

"Keep the gentleman covered, 'Rastus,'" ordered the man from Denver.

"Ay, ay, mer daisy," was the response.

A moment later the yellow-haired sport seized the disguised Martin Reno's hands gave them a sharp twist downward and backward, and *click, click!* the man's wrists were encircled by a pair of handcuffs that held them behind him.

A string of hissing oaths escaped the entrapped villain's lips.

"You shall pay dearly for this, curse you both!" he raved.

Unheeding his fierce words, the sport forced him to march up to the bar. Duff, the saloon-keeper, was aroused, and the false beard and wig were removed from Reno's face and head in his presence.

"There is a charge of outlawry against this man that can be proved beyond a doubt," declared Daisy Dare. "He should be tried at once. If held till morning, even, he may escape justice."

"I agree with you," said Duff. "If he can be given a fair trial, I'm in fer gittin' his case off our hands as soon as possible."

An hour later, the Black Dragon Saloon was filled with men who had been aroused to witness the trial and hanging of an outlaw. The men of Roaring Bend proposed to dispose of Martin Reno's case this time "for good an' all."

But the Daisy Sport had a greater object in view than the punishment of one outlaw. He wished to exterminate the entire band and settle the point as to whether Reno was Scarlet Mask.

In secret, Dare said to Jimmy Duff:

"I am willing to bet high that, if we attempt to hang Reno, the outlaws will come to his rescue. Then is the time for the camp to get in its fine work. A dozen good men, prepared for the emergency, will inspire and lead the remainder of the citizens. The trial must be protracted as long as possible, in order to give the outlaws time to prepare for the rescue. We must lay our plans to thwart them."

A few moments later, Duff was moving quickly around amid the crowd. Now and then he would call a man aside, and whisper a few hasty words in his ear.

The trial began within the saloon, but without,

some of the men privately spoken to by the saloon-keeper were at work. Near the gallows-tree a pile of brush and wood was being rapidly heaped, preparatory for a large bonfire.

Further on down the street, several men were silently at work, stringing lassoes across the street. The lassoes were drawn taut and made fast at each end, so that they were at various heights from the ground from two to seven feet.

While these men were at work, the trial was progressing within the saloon. The affair was decidedly informal, a "ju ge" and "jury" having been selected, and the prisoner given the privilege to choose some one to defend him. But Reno preferred to plead his own case.

By the men of the camp it was not deemed necessary to compel Edna Greydon to appear at the trial to testify against the accused. Her story repeated by those who had heard it from her own lips, was considered sufficient under the circumstances.

Reno soon saw that his case was hopeless, and, firmly closing his lips, he refused to utter a word.

Both Dare and the saloon-keeper did all they could to prolong the trial, but finally the charge was given to the jury, and with scarcely a minute's hesitation, they returned a verdict of "guilty." The judge then sentenced the prisoner to be hanged.

Barely had the jury ceased speaking when an ominous murmur sounded through the room. In less than half-a-minute the murmur had swelled to a wild cry for blood.

Forth from the saloon poured the crowd carrying the doomed man with them. The bonfire had been lighted and the red flames appeared to leap and dance in savage glee.

Once more Martin Reno was borne toward the gallows tree by a bloodthirsty mob of the citizens of Roaring Bend, and as they halted beneath the tree, down the street came a band of somber horsemen, yelling and firing their revolvers. And at their head, astride a milk-white steed, rode a scarlet-masked form, the Colorado Claude Duval!

CHAPTER XVI.

UNMASKED AT LAST.

FOR the third time did the outlaws charge into the camp of Roaring Bend for the purpose of rescuing some one about to be hanged. Twice had they met with perfect success, but the third attempt proved fatal for them.

They were expected, and the best men of the camp were prepared to receive them *wormy*.

The moment the outlaws entered the circle of light made by the bonfire, they became exposed to a terrible shower of lead from the rifles and revolvers of more than a dozen men who were just beyond the circle of light.

At the first volley, four or five of the road-agents reeled and fell from the saddles of their horses.

The next moment the street behind the outlaws was filled with dark forms, and a retreat was cut off.

But the masked horsemen did not pause. Ready hands grasped the bridles of the riderless horses, and by the gallows-tree they dashed. As they passed, a burly outlaw rode beneath the tree, grasped Martin Reno, and lifted the helpless man up before him.

Then they swept down the street.

But suddenly they were brought to an abrupt halt by the lassoes stretched across the street, which they had not seen in the darkness, and wild cries of rage came from their startled lips.

Their cries were answered by savage yells of exultation and joy from the men of the camp, and for the first time, some of the road-agents realized that they might be in a trap.

It was useless to attempt to cut the many lassoes in the darkness, and, knowing this, the scarlet-masked outlaw gave the order to retreat.

"About!" he cried, in clear tones. "Charge the fools, and shoot to kill! Follow me!"

Like a whirlwind, the black horsemen swept back up the street. But the men of Roaring Bend were ready to receive them, and the moment they entered the circle of light made by the bonfire, another destructive volley of lead was poured into them.

Down went horses and riders, and then the madmen, exultant citizens closed in upon the doomed outlaws.

It was a fight to the death.

Singling out the scarlet masked chief, Daisy Dare bounded forward, and grasping the white horse by the bridle, fired upward, with the muzzle of his revolver not two yards from the outlaw's head. Catching the falling form in his arms, the sport started to bear it beyond the circle of light, but a dark shadow confronted him.

It was Toddy Bob, and in his right-hand the old toper held a gleaming knife.

With a snarling oath, the drunkard leaped toward the sport, striking savagely with the knife. Dare dropped his burden and sprung back a step, throwing up his hand, and discharging a revolver with the muzzle almost touching the breast of his foe.

The knife fell from Bob's fingers, and pressing his hands to his breast, he sunk down, with a low, gurgling moan.

Meanwhile the fight was raging fiercely on all sides. In fact, it was raging too fiercely to last long. The termination only came, however, when the last outlaw was dead or disabled.

The citizens had not escaped without losing blood. Indeed, several of them lay upon the ground, dead or dying. But when the unharmed victors saw that they had won the fight, a wild yell of triumph burst from their lips.

It was an occasion never to be forgotten by those who took part in the desperate battle.

After the fight, Toddy Bob was found beside the silent form of the scarlet-masked outlaw. When they lifted the road-agent to carry him to the White Horse Hotel, Bob begged them to take him along, but they paid no heed to the old timer.

Martin Reno was found, where he had fallen desperately wounded by a bullet.

Near at hand, lay the strange madman of the mountains, unconscious, evidently stunned by a heavy blow on the head.

Both were carried to the hotel.

Within one of the large rooms of the White Horse a crowd gathered to witness the unmasking of the scarlet-faced chief. The outlaw was still either unconscious or dead, for he made no move, but lay silently stretched upon a long table.

The sport from Denver advanced and stood over the silent form.

"Gentlemen," he said, smiling quietly, as he glanced over the crowd, "success is ours. We have exterminated the outlaws, and captured their chief. I feel confident to say that this outlaw is not dead. I fired the bullet which brought him down, and I think he is not dead, but unconscious. To-night the question as to the identity of Scarlet Mask will be forever settled. I will now remove the mask."

With a quick motion of his deft fingers Daisy Dare removed the covering from the outlaw's face.

A cry of amazement broke from the crowd.

The face revealed was a woman's! and that woman was the one known in Roaring Bend camp as the daughter of the old top r, Toddy Bob!

In that room no man appeared more surprised than the sport from Denver. Upon his face was a look of blank amazement.

Even while the thunderstruck crowd were gazing at the unmasked face, the eyes of the woman slowly unclosed, and her gaze fell upon Daisy Dare. A look of fear and hatred contorted her features.

"You here?" she gasped.

"Gentlemen," cried the daisy sport, "there must be something wrong about this affair. This woman cannot be the outlaw-chief."

"I am Scarlet Mask!" declared the woman, feebly, yet with sudden energy. "I swear it!"

Into the room staggered a man whose hands were pressed to his blood-stained breast, and whose eyes already seemed covered by a death-film. It was Toddy Bob.

"The game is lost, Ada!" he gasped. "I am dying!" Then he turned to the crowd, shrieking out:

"I am Scarlet Mask, curse you all!"

And with these words, he fell heavily forward upon his face. When they turned him over, it was seen that he was dead.

Uttering a sharp shriek, the unmasked woman sank down beside the body of the dead man, sobbing and moaning.

"Back, you friends!" she cried. "You have murdered him! Oh, Hubert! Hub-rt!"

"Take her away, some one!" sternly ordered the man from Denver. "I must examine the corpse. Take her away!"

Strong hands grasped the wretched woman, and despite her struggles and cries, held her fast.

Kneeling beside the dead man, the sport made a hasty examination. A cry broke from his lips.

"This beard is false!" he declared. "Gentlemen, see here!"

With these words he made a quick motion, and removed a scraggy mass of false beard from the dead man's face.

Just one keen look did Dare take at the features thus exposed, then he arose to his feet, saying quietly:

"Men of Roaring Bend, I am a detective. Six months ago I started on the trail of Hubert Dawes, an inhuman scoundrel, who had murdered a beautiful young girl in Denver. The blood-stained wretch gave me a hard chase, but he now lies dead at my feet."

"An' that is Poker Paul, ther cuss w'ot murdered my pard!" exclaimed Erastus Wagg.

Dare turned toward the woman.

"What was this man to you?" he asked.

"He was my husband," was the reply.

"And he was chief of the outlaws?"

"He was, but I sometimes acted in his place."

"You are a woman," said Dare, "and you may consider yourself under my protection. Whatever revelations you may make will be considered in your favor. Who is Martin Reno?"

With a few brief words the woman explained several things which had puzzled Dare.

Reno was Hubert Dawes's brother, with whom he had quarreled many years before. At first the outlaw had not recognized his brother, but, when he did, he had done whatever he could to aid him. Twice he had rescued Reno, or properly Martin Dawes, from hanging. The last time he revealed to him that he was his brother. Martin Dawes was in no way connected with the outlaws; but upon being rescued the previous night, he had accompanied his brother to the outlaws' stronghold. He was desperately in love with Edna Greydon, and had enticed the girl to the outlaws' retreat, intending to compel her to become his wife.

When the girl was rescued, knowing that, if she reached Roaring Bend ere Martin Dawes left the camp, he would probably be accused and captured, Ada Dawes, attired as Scarlet Mask, had, with her followers, made for the Bend, determined to rescue her husband's brother. They had waited on the outskirts of the camp until Martin Dawes was dragged forth to be hanged, then charged to the rescue.

Hubert Dawes as Toddy Bob had lived in the cabin on the cliff, a short distance from the camp. His wife had lived there with him the greater part of the time, and they had passed as father and daughter. So successfully had they played their parts that no one had ever thought of suspecting them.

It was not known that Hubert Dawes was married, and therefore Detective Dare had not once suspected that the strange woman who once made a desperate attempt to take his life was the wife of the man whom he was hunting down.

In another room of the White Horse Hotel, Martin Reno, alias Martin Dawes, lay dying.

At his request, Edna Greydon was summoned to his side.

"Can you forgive me the wrong I have done you?" he asked, faintly. "No, do not speak too quickly! The wrong is greater than you think. Hear my confession:

"The story that I told you of your father's death is false. I have not long to live, therefore I will speak briefly. Your father and I were partners. He owned the map by means of which we hoped to find the lost gold *carve*, but if it was found we were to share equally. One night we quarreled over the map. I grabbed at it, and between us we tore it in two. He was unarmed. I drew a knife and struck him. He ran, and I pursued him until I saw him go plunging over a precipice. Then I went back to the tent, thinking that I could easily find his mangled remains at the foot of the precipice in the morning. But, when the morning came, I could not find the body. I now know that he escaped death, but how I cannot tell. To-day he wanders through these mountains, a madman."

"A madman no longer!" said a deep voice, and the strange man often seen around the camp stepped into the room. "Thank God, my reason has returned!"

A wild cry of joy rung through the room, and father and daughter were clasped in each other's arms—reunited.

One point remains to be made clear. It will be remembered that, at the close of the first chapter, a dying outlaw seemingly accused Martin Reno, alias Dawes, of being the outlaw chief, Scarlet Mask. At that time Toddy Bob was standing a little back of Martin Dawes, and it was he at whom the dying man pointed. No one thought of suspecting the cleverly disguised outlaw, however, but at once turned upon Martin Dawes as being the one accused.

Martin Dawes breathed his last just as the light of another day began to dispel the shadows of darkness. The last moments of his wicked life passed easier when both Lewis Greydon and his daughter assured him that he was forgiven by them for the wrong he had done them.

When a lynching-party of the citizens of Roaring Bend called for the woman who had often worn the scarlet mask upon her face, she could not be found. In some mysterious way she had disappeared, and was never after seen in that camp.

And as for Erastus Wagg, "the woolly headed man," his trail of vengeance ended with the death of Hubert Dawes. Detective Dan Dare's trail also ended at the same time. He failed in bringing the murderer to justice, but he received the reward offered by the citizens of Roaring Bend for the capture, dead or alive, of the Colorado Claude.

"Specter next thing onto their programme you'll be axin' t'er han'sum black-eyed gal ef she won't hitch wi' yer fer better or wus," observed Wagg to the daisy detective.

"Just as likely as not, 'Rastus," laughed Dare.

In due time he did, and Edna said "yes."

THE END.

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